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Tories ready to slam on Euro brakes

Anthony Bevins

Political Editor

John Major is preparing for outright conflict and further non-cooperation with the rest of the European Union in the run-up to next May's general election. He has chosen a number of potential battle grounds that will be used to exploit the political differences between the Conservatives and Labour, who will be portrayed as the poodles of Brussels.

The Prime Minister told EU leaders in Dublin earlier this month that if, as expected, the European Court reaffirms the 48-hour-week Working Time Directive in an imminent judgment, he would require a treaty amendment to override the verdict of the court. He is also demanding an end to fisheries quota hopping, the system which allows the Spanish to buy up British allocations. Again, if necessary, he is demanding a treaty change.

When Mr Major negotiated the Maastricht Social Chapter

Major embarks on high-risk strategy of confrontation with partner countries

opt-out in 1991, it was agreed that health and safety provisions would not be used as a backdoor method of introducing employment legislation such as the Working Time Directive.

That principle is now in jeopardy. The Government regards the directive as a direct breach of that agreement and Mr Major told a Confederation of British Industry dinner last May: "If old agreements are to be broken, I do not see how we can reach new agreements."

Ministers have warned, however, that some EU members would veto any treaty change to satisfy the British on that question.

Conservative sources said in Bournemouth last week that the Prime Minister had decided there could be no deal on the

latest round of European intergovernmental talks, due to be settled in Amsterdam next June, unless and until that route to "backdoor socialism" had been closed.

If that was the case, Mr Major would retaliate – directly vetoing any new treaty based on the current intergovernmental negotiations. That opens the way for a conflict which would reverberate through all sessions of the inter-governmental talks in the run-up to December's Dublin summit, and beyond, in the run-up to the British May election.

However, Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, went even further in an unreported lecture delivered on the Bournemouth fringe of the Conservative Party Conference

that same day.

Mr Major has been warned by

EU colleagues in Dublin this month that he will not tolerate the continuation of fisheries quota hopping. "If the present treaties don't allow us to correct the abuses that presently exist under the Common Fisheries Policy," he said, "then the treaties must be changed". As with the Working Time Directive, it is most improbable that Mr Major will win unanimous endorsement for his demands on fisheries policy. Without unanimity, there can be no treaty change.

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But given the Tories' tough stance against EU development while portraying Labour as a Brussels push-over, any confrontation will play straight into Mr Major's hands in the lead-up to the next election.

Given Tory divisions, the impending battle with the EU could be fought with risk for the party high command. But a calculation has been made that the strategy is much more likely to please the Eurosceptics than to provoke the Heathite "grandees" into fresh open protest. It is believed that as the pro-Europeans are more loyal to the leadership, they are more likely to keep quiet about Mr Major's new anti-EU confrontation on the eve of a critical election.

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news

Tories in turmoil: Thurnham allegations denied as 'sleaze' debate again threatens party

Defector 'was offered knighthood'

COLIN BROWN
Chief Political Correspondent

The former Tory MP Peter Thurnham said yesterday he had received hints of a knighthood or the possibility of a safer Conservative seat, to stop him defecting to the Liberal Democrats. But the allegations have been strongly denied by the Tory Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney.

The defection of Mr Thurnham, previously MP for Bolton North East, to the Liberal Democrats over alleged "Tory sleaze", has come as a severe blow to the Conservatives' attempts to rebuild morale in the party. Today, the Labour and Liberal Democrat leadership will join forces to call on the Speaker of the House, Betty Boothroyd, to order a high-powered inquiry into the "sleaze" allegations.

As the Tories were threatened with being plunged back into the mire over the "sleaze" allegations, Peter Mandelson, the head of Labour's election campaign, said Mr Thurnham's defection – coming after the Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth – had "put the cork very firmly back in Tories' champagne bottle".

Mr Thurnham, who resigned the whip in February, this year, said he had been approached by Mr Mawhinney, who talked of ways by which the Conservative Party could look after him. Mr Thurnham said he believed he was being offered a knighthood. He named another former party official who had also said he could get Mr Thurnham's name put on the selection lists for other seats.

But a Tory party source said: "Mr Mawhinney has given an absolutely and unequivocal denial that such a meeting took place. Perhaps he is looking for



On the move: Peter Thurnham at Westminster yesterday with his new leader, Paddy Ashdown of the Liberal Democrats

Photograph: Reuters

a peerage now from the Liberal Democrats."

Bolton North East became highly marginal through boundary changes. Mr Thurnham was upset when he failed to get an interview for a seat in the Lake District where had family connections, and his defection has been dismissed by the party as a "fit of pique" over his failure

to get another seat. His defection involved a cloak and dagger operation that sounded like an extract from the television drama series, *House of Cards*. Senior Conservative figures, led by Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, had tried to persuade him not to resign in protest at the Government's handling of the Nolan

committee inquiry into "cash for questions" and the Scott report on claims that ministers had colluded to send arms to Iraq. Mr Thurnham worked closely with Archy Kirkwood, the Liberal Democrat whip, on two Government bills, on which he voted against the Government. He has decided not to contest any seat at the election, but said

he had met Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat leader, to discuss defection to the Liberal Democrats before the summer recess. He saw Mr Ashdown at his flat in London last Tuesday and the following day rang back to say he was ready to join the Liberal Democrats.

Mr Thurnham, who has a successful engineering busi-

ness, said the turning point came when he had breakfast during the summer with Ian Wrigglesworth, a Liberal Democrat adviser on the economy. Mr Wrigglesworth told Mr Thurnham that Liberal Democrats had "their heart on the left and their pocket on the right – exactly how I have operated for 13 years in Parliament".

Heseltine hails the humble Chancellor

COLIN BROWN

Kenneth Clarke yesterday was hailed as a "man of the people" by Michael Heseltine after the Tories were embarrassed to discover that he was not a grammar school boy after all.

John Major opened the first salvo in the war of the "old school ties" in his address to the Conservative Party conference on Friday when he suggested that he had come from more humble beginnings than Tony Blair, the Labour leader.

"New Labour – Old School Tie," said Mr Major. The inverted snobbery is part of the Tories' strategy of presenting Mr Major as "honest John" against "Phoney Tony". The Chancellor

was presented by Mr Major as a grammar-school boy, unlike the privately educated Mr Blair.

Labour's deputy leader, John Prescott, an old boy of a secondary school in Ellesmere Port, Merseyside, pointed out that Mr Clarke went on a scholarship to Nottingham High, the city's top independent school, and was soon on a fast track to Cambridge University.

Mr Prescott said only three of the 23-strong Cabinet had put their children in state schools.

Mr Heseltine (Shrewsbury, Pembroke College, Oxford) said on BBC Television's *Breakfast with Frost* that Mr Clarke, strictly speaking, may not be a grammar school boy – "but he is a man of the people".

Peter Mandelson, the head of Labour's election campaign, on the same programme apologised for not wearing his old school tie from a north London comprehensive.

The Tory attack on Mr Blair has angered the Labour leader, who said on GMTV that he did not want to fight the general election "in the gutter".

Tory strategists believe their plan, to highlight Mr Blair's background as the son of a Tory, who went to Pettes College, Edinburgh, is legitimate. David Davies, a Foreign Office minister, said: "They have been attacking John Major non-stop for six years in the most brutal way and then they whinge like this. It is nothing but hypocrisy."

The survey by the Institute of Management survey found seven in ten managers believed that the Government's policies on Europe had weakened Britain's position within the European Union. Forty-five per cent no longer thought the Conservatives were

the natural party of business while 56 per cent thought it was time for the Government to go.

It was the Government's approach to Europe was the major cause of dissatisfaction among those polled. At last week's Tory party conference in Bournemouth, John Major largely succeeded in keeping the lid on the row between the party's Eurosceptic wing and pro-Europeans. But the IoM poll, carried out by Quick Reaction Survey, suggests it is a source of acute concern. Seven in ten managers feared that a Eurosceptic agenda – notably a commitment to rule out joining a single currency in the next Parliament – would adversely affect business. More than 60 per cent also said that British membership of the European Union is damaging the UK's interests.

The bad news for the Tories was compounded by Professor Sanders' computer modelling. He told The Independent that the most optimistic result for the Tories in a general election next May was 39 per cent of the vote, level with Labour on 39 per cent, which would leave Labour about eight seats short of an overall majority in the Commons. That would almost certainly ensure that Tony Blair was prime minister at the head of a minority government.

Seventy-three per cent also believed the Government had failed to invest adequately in education and 54 per cent thought it had increased the burden of red tape on business. However, three-quarters thought that the Government's policies had improved Britain's competitiveness and a majority thought it could be trusted to keep spending and inflation under control.

Roger Young, the IoM's director general, said: "Managers believe the Tories ... have lost touch with British business. Europe is the key to Britain's long-term prosperity and managers are concerned that the Conservative's approach to Europe is damaging the UK's interests."

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No sympathy for the devil as Jagger's Rock and Roll Circus gives satisfaction to fans after 28 years



Roll up, roll up: Also appearing in the show that Mick Jagger refused to broadcast as a Christmas special in 1968 included Keith Moon of The Who (above, left), pictured with Jagger; (above right, from top) John Lennon (left) with Jagger; Brian Jones (left) and Charlie Watts of the Stones; and Marianne Faithfull

Photographs: ABKCO

DAVID LISTER
Arts News Editor

It is a legendary, but for many years hidden, moment in the history of rock music. A night when the Rolling Stones embraced the more embarrassing qualities of the hippy era—psychedelic imagery, silly stage outfits, drugs and stoned dialogues, under-rehearsed supergroups and bum notes—and captured it all on film.

The Rolling Stones's *Rock And Roll Circus* started on the morning of 10 December, 1968, with clowns, acrobats, fire-eaters, trapeze artists and a box

ing kangaroo and ended at 5.30am the next day, after a performance by Their Satanic Majesties themselves.

In the intervening hours, John Lennon performed in an impromptu supergroup comprising Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Mitch Mitchell (drummer with the Jimi Hendrix Experience); the same group backed Yoko Ono as she performed; Marianne Faithfull, dressed in a floor-length satin gown, sang as Jagger held her hand. The Who gave a rea-

dition of their first rock opera, "Quick One While's He's Away", reckoned to be the best performance of the night; Jethro Tull opened the show and a now obscure singer called Taj Mahal made up numbers.

During the whole jamboree, Jagger dressed and acted as circus ringmaster; Lennon wore a juggler's outfit with silver sequins and black face ruffles; Yoko Ono was dressed as a witch, all in black with a pointed hat and The Rolling Stones wore ancient military uniforms.

After 28 years, *The Rock And Roll Circus*, intended to be a TV special that Christmas of 1968, is finally to be shown. A CD of the highlights is issued in Britain tomorrow and a video next month. Both have been released by ABKCO, the New York company run by Allen Klein, once manager of The Stones and some Beatles.

The Rock And Roll Circus has many claims to a place in pop legend. The Stones' performance was the last ever of their guitarist, Brian Jones, who was to die a few months later and it had the startling sight for the audience of Lennon and Ono on stage together. The fact that neither the Beatles nor the Stones had played live for two years gave it further significance. But Jagger, who had organised the whole event, based largely on his love of English circuses, was displeased with the outcome and refused to sanction its release.

The rights to the film and CID release, however, belong to Mr Klein, who believes that the sound track and video have been much sought after by music fans, and is not unaware of the huge sales generated by archive material, such as *The Beatles' Anthology*.

Rock writer David Dalton,

who has become the historian of the event, says: "The Rock and Roll Circus captures the delirious optimism of an era. Depending on your point of view, it was either the high point in the history of the cosmos, or a period of mass hallucination, or both. But call it what you will, for a brief moment it seemed that rock 'n' roll would inherit the Earth."

US company to release CD and video of legendary rock film

Goldsmith harvests the Boycott vote

CLARE GARNER and COLIN BROWN

True to form, the Yorkshire cricket legend Geoffrey Boycott played a straight bat when asked whether he would be one of Sir James Goldsmith's star team of candidates for the Referendum Party at the next election. "All I know is my personal view coincides [with the Referendum Party's]," he said in New Delhi yesterday. "We don't want to be ruled by anyone—but ourselves—politicians always seem to tell us they know better ... But what a right fuck-up they make."

Asked whether he would vote for the Referendum Party, Mr Boycott, who turned down an invitation to air his views at the party's inaugural conference in Brighton on Saturday because of TV commenting duties in India, replied that he would "wait and see". Oddly, by signing up for Sir



Sir Geoffrey Boycott: feeling sympathy for the new party

Goldsmith's party, he would find himself on the same side as his long-time cricketing adversary Imran Khan, married to Sir James's daughter Jenkins, who is expected to help the party during the election.

At Brighton, however, there

will be another new celebrity recruit—the actor, Edward Fox, 59. He will tell delegates that referendums are part of the British heritage. "I am greatly impressed by John Redwood," he said. "Obviously an extremely clever man. But I'm not so sure that he has the qualities or is in a position to be the leader that Britain needs at this time."

Writing in the *The Express* on Sunday, Mr Fox said he had "the greatest faith in the sanity, common sense and wisdom of the ordinary Englishman". Charles de Gaulle, the 48-year-old grandson of the late French president and MEP colleague of Sir James, is also expected to speak at the conference.

As the Referendum Party's election campaign launch got underway, Sir James turned the heat up on Tory Eurosceptic MPs whom he could be challenged. The party is fielding a candidate against Sir Michael Spicer, a leading Eurosceptic

Tory MP. "Michael Spicer's history is one of moving with the wind. On the left wing in Heath's government, he moved over and became a Thatcherite. I do not believe what he says," Sir James said on the BBC's programme, *On the Record*.

But Sir James said there was no Referendum Party threat to Ken Livingstone, the Labour MP. In spite of being described by Sir James as a Euro-federalist, Mr Livingstone supported a referendum and would therefore escape a challenge.

The Referendum Party also

includes candidates John Goldsmith (no relation) and his wife Julia, who take opposite views about Europe, but agree on the need for a referendum. Because of their voting record, the eight Eurosceptics who lost the Tory whip would not be challenged, either. Sir Teddy Taylor, one of the leading Tory Eurosceptics, said the Referendum Party would "take off like a rocket".

Found backstage at the V&A – a treasure trove of eccentricity

MARIONNE MACDONALD
Arts Correspondent

First there was *The House*, the documentary which exposed the Royal Opera House as riven by strife. Now there is *The Museum*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary that portrays the Victoria and Albert as a loony bin staffed by amiable eccentrics.

The hour-long BBC2 film which has given the V&A trustees sleepless nights follows a year in the life of the museum, founded in 1852 as a showcase for the British Empire's treasures, but developed to cater for British eccentricities.

Those set to gain personal fan clubs from the programme are Caroline Cedarwell, the cashier; Martin Ramsay, the mild-mannered security guard; and Stephen Calloway, the swash-buckling, moustachioed curator. The staff's view of the museum

as mental hospital is succinctly summed up by Ms Cedarwell.

This museum is like the extension of a West London loony bin. When I first came here I thought everyone was on a day-release scheme," she comments long-sufferingly.

Her opinion is echoed by Mr Calloway, a part-time curator in the prints and drawings department, who cuts a startling figure with his curling moustache, pointed beard, and flowing shoulder-length hair. "It's a kind of nature reserve for eccentricity and I rather value that," he says. "I think it's the kind of place for people who

have an interesting perception."

Other quirky characters include front-of-house manager Julian Linen, who explains that "it was either going to work at the V&A or going to train as a buyer in the antiques department at Harrods". He, in fact,

chose Harrods, but "I was adamant the station for Harrods was South Kensington. I couldn't see Harrods, but I saw the V&A, and thought: 'I've got a job here, I might as well turn up there.' So I did."

He is seen in the film coaching staff for the private view of the William Morris exhibition. "Your task is to ... make sure

they go in orderly groups. Some

of them won't want to be orderly, because I can assure you that hell hath no fury like a Blue Rinse scorned," he announces.

Cutly, the hunched warden who oversees the fire alarm system, confides to camera: "This was out of date when it was put in ... you've got so many wires you wouldn't want to look. Probably got dead bodies in there..."

The programme, to be shown on 23 October, tracks the museum's life between last October and August, a period when it made plans for a new building, cut its budget, and agreed to introduce entry charges.

Keith Cooper, the corporate affairs director at Covent Garden, soared to fame when he was filmed hurling a telephone to the floor during *The House*. Now meet Stephen, Martin, Caroline and Cutly, the new cul-

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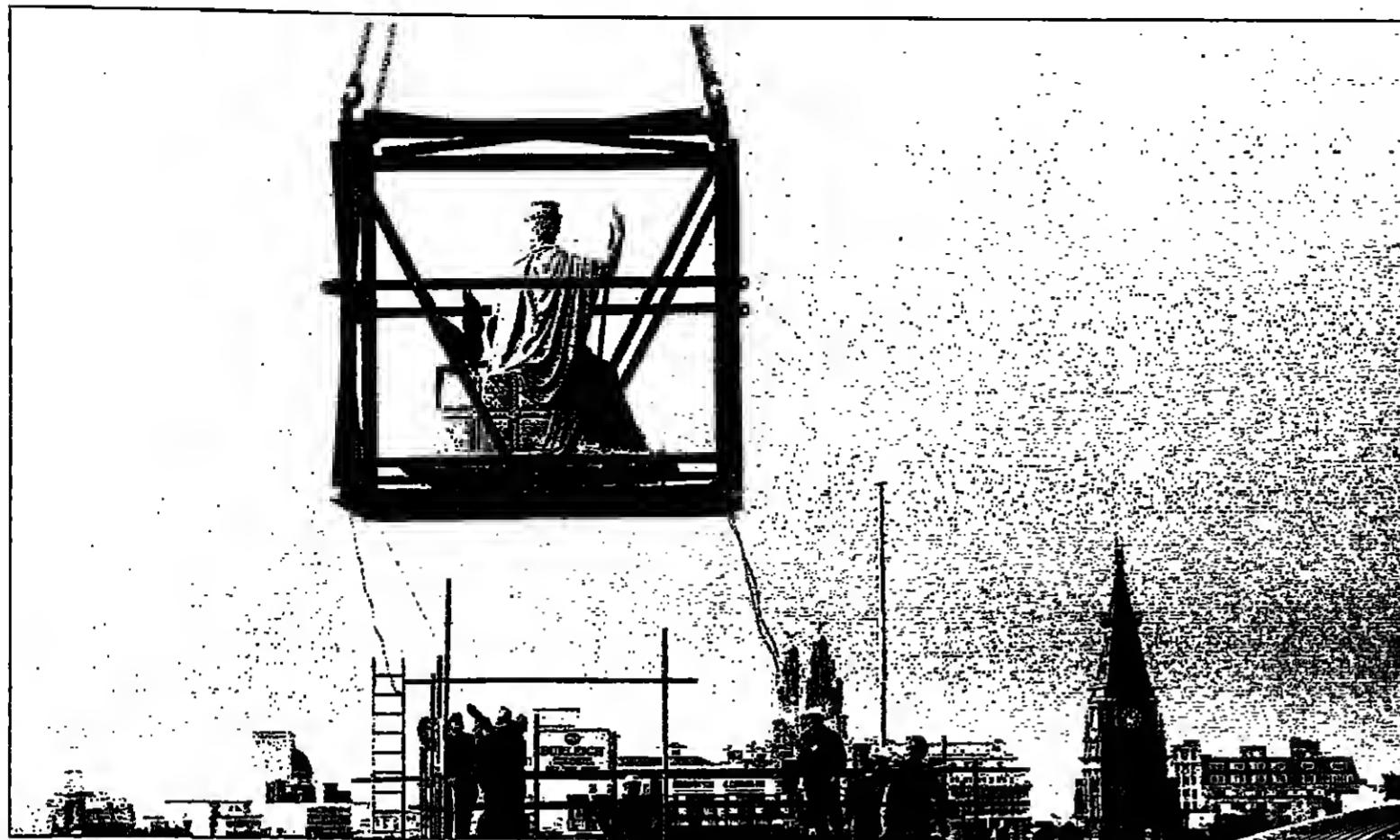
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news



Artistic heights: A marble copy of the Spirit of Liverpool statue being hoisted on to the roof of city's Walker Art Gallery. The original, erected by John Warrington Wood in 1876, has been removed and preserved for display in Liverpool's new Conservation Centre. Photograph: Craig Easton

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Refugee curbs divide Rifkind and Howard

JASON BENNETT
Crime Correspondent

A private letter from Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, has disclosed an embarrassing split with Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, over proposed changes to the asylum laws.

Claims by Mr Howard that Pakistan is a "safe" country and therefore its citizens are unlikely to deserve asylum in Britain are contradicted by Mr Rifkind in a letter obtained by *The Independent*.

Writing to Brian Mawhinney, chairman of the Conservative Party, Mr Rifkind states that there are credible reports of persecution and attacks, backed by the authorities, against a minority religious group in Pakistan.

Tomorrow the Commons will vote on the establishment of a "white list" of seven countries from where asylum applications would be presumed to be sound unless it could be proved otherwise. The countries identified by the Home Office earlier this year during the second reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill as "safe" are Cyprus, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Ghana, India and Pakistan.

Labour yesterday seized upon Mr Rifkind's letter as evidence of a rift between the Foreign Office and Home Office and is demanding the removal of Pakistan from the "white list".

Amnesty International, the Refugee Council and other organisations say people on the list are in danger of persecution, torture and even death for their political and religious beliefs.

Mr Howard has defended the list as part of an attempt to reduce the number of economic migrants entering Britain.

But in May Dr Mawhinney, believed to be writing on behalf of a constituent, asked Mr Rifkind about the plight of the Ahmadis religious group, who under threat of death have been banned from declaring them-

selves to be Muslims in Pakistan. Mr Rifkind replied: "Radical sectarian groups and individuals have carried out attacks against Ahmadis. In some cases there are credible reports that the local authorities have given tacit support to these actions."

"We, and our EU partners, have expressed concern to the government of Pakistan about the treatment of minorities and blasphemy laws. We understand that the government of Pakistan would like to amend the blasphemy laws, but they have encountered strong opposition to any changes and none has yet been enacted."

The last paragraph appears to contradict a Home Office assessment that "Ahmadis are recognised as a minority religious group and rights are safeguarded under the constitution".

Doug Henderson, a Labour home affairs spokesman, said: "This letter makes clear more divisions in the Conservative Party. I am making representations to the Secretary of State to have Pakistan removed from the list."

A Home Office spokesman said: "People from white-list countries with a genuine case would be confirmed as refugees."



Vandalism in Rotherham's woods. Photograph: Peter Byrne

Scenic tour finds the ugly side of rural life

ESTHER LEACH

Country-side officers agreed that it was a good idea. They would show everyone the true rural picture. And so one of the most unlikely sightseeing tours began.

Five people caught the minibus outside the rangers' office at Ulley Country Park in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, to follow a route of burnt-out cars, mounds of rubbish and graffiti marring the town's beauty spots.

"It's not just a problem in Rotherham, it's a national one. But we are the ones who have decided to highlight what's going on," Rick Green, the environmental officer who drove the bus, said. "It's a chance for people to see and understand some of our problems and discuss ideas for dealing with them."

He pulled in at a lay-by opposite Treeton Woods. "It's beautiful here. Calm and ideal for bird watching," he said as the group made its way through the undergrowth.

But just a few feet away was the burnt out shell of a car. "How anyone managed to get it through the woods in the first place is a mystery to me," said Mr Green. "And it's going to cost us a fortune to get it out."

The youngest of the tour group, Steve Malone, 15, shrugged his shoulders at the sight. "It's not something I or anyone I know would do for fun."

but young people would probably get the blame."

Two infant-school teachers trailed behind as the group headed for Bole Hill Plantation. "I know our children would be horrified to see this," Samina Qureshi said. "I think our countryside officers are preaching to the converted on this tour. It's up to us to spread the word."

Bole Hill Plantation is a reclaimed spoil heap where hundreds of young trees have been planted over the last few years. Fire, deliberately set, has ravaged many of them.

"An older woodland may have regenerated, but these young trees wouldn't stand much chance... we will have to replant," Mr Green said.

Then it was on to Whiston Meadows, where a new parking area is often as a rubbish dump. Small metal notices with rangers' telephone numbers fixed to gate posts have been used as targets by airgun users.

A short walk along a footpath and over a stream leads to a picnic area. Among the dense trees which surround the area a man with a spade is bent over filling a sack with top soil.

"If everyone did that we would be in real trouble," said Mr Green. "It wouldn't be a good idea to have a word with him now. I don't know how he might react and I must think of the safety of the group."

The sight-seekers went elsewhere for their picnic lunch.

DAILY POEM

Heartmelt

By John Fuller

*The treacherous blue of the hollow snow
And the ancient blue of the glacier
Are like the flicker of a headache
Or the acid of the eelcher
Making transparent what was opaque,
And now the haunting, oh so slow
Beginning of movement, the light of ice
Dripped from a tip of rock, showing
The sun what beacons are, the gins
And dribble of the water flowing
Freely now, falling without stint,
Once each drop has fallen twice:
The danger is past, as we have long felt:
Thought mountains are still there, the mountains melt.*

John Fuller has been awarded the prestigious Forward Poetry Prize for Best Collection for his *Stones and Fire*, published by Chatto. A Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, since 1966, as teacher and poet he has nurtured two full generations of undergraduate poets – including James Fenton, Mick Imlah and Mark Wormold – and produced 12 collections of poetry. Chatto publish his *Collected Poems* in 1997.

CHG2

Tests force teachers to use old methods

JUDITH JUDD
Education Editor

Tests for 11-year-olds, introduced by the Government three years ago, are forcing schools to use more traditional teaching methods, according to research published today.

A study by the government-funded Economic and Social Research Council shows that more primary schools are using whole-class teaching and more are grouping children by ability – both policies supported by traditionalists.

In one school, children were divided by ability rather than age for English, maths and science, so that nine-year-olds were being taught with 11-year-olds. The Hume Counties school believed that advancing children was a good way of competing with private schools.

The study found that children were being tested more between the ages of seven and 11. Though primary schools are not placing pupils in rank order, growing numbers are using rows of stars on a notice-board to illustrate children's progress in spelling and multiplication tables so their position in class is self-evident.

And teachers are spending

more time preparing them for the national tests, which are in May. Some schools are starting science and maths revision in January and some are using practice tests from commercial publishers.

The researchers, Professor Caroline Gipps of London University's Institute of Education and Professor Margaret Brown, of King's College, London, looked at 32 teachers from 32 schools. They found that teachers had changed their methods as a direct result of the introduction of the tests.

Fourteen schools had changed from mixed-ability classes to setting pupils or grouping them by ability in different subjects. Eight had moved away from topic work to teaching individual subjects.

More than half the teachers said they had changed to a more didactic style of teaching, instructing pupils rather than encouraging them to find things out for themselves, and four schools had decided to introduce more whole-class teaching, with the pupils spending less time working in groups or on their own and more with the teacher teaching the whole class.

The researchers also found that teachers were emphasising different aspects of work. They tended to focus more on reading and spelling and maths questions of the sort most likely to be found in the tests were set.

Despite the strong influence of the tests on how teachers teach, most junior school teachers thought they were unfair. For instance, children who were slow but thorough did badly because of the time limit.

Gulf war veterans' battle over medical records. Page 8



Catching on: To meet Commission quotas Britain will have to reduce fishing fleets

Photograph: Tom Pilston

Britain resists EU plan to conserve fish

Brussels is pressuring the UK to cut fish catches by almost half

KATHERINE BUTLER
Brussels

The Government faces another furious row over Europe if it bows to pressure from Brussels to start negotiating today on cuts of up to 50 per cent in British fish catches. British ministers have demanded the closure of an EU legal loophole which allows the Spanish and Dutch fishing industry to exploit Britain's national fish rights – the so-called "quota hopping" phenomenon – before new cuts can be discussed.

But Emma Bonino, the EU Fisheries Commissioner, is determined to keep to her plan, which is aimed at saving the region's dwindling fish stocks. She will tell European fisheries ministers when they gather in Luxembourg today that their fleets face "the law of the jungle". If they reject the cuts that are needed to prevent threatened species such as cod, haddock, hake and salmon, from being wiped out.

"If you don't have any fish left you won't have a fishing sector," she said. The Commission's proposals are for cuts in "fish mortality" of up to 40 per cent over six years, starting in 1997.

Britain's failure to keep pace with its past obligations on reducing fleet size means it must now add a further 10 per cent backlog of capacity cuts. To further inflame British anger, Spain, viewed as the worst offender when it comes to illegal fishing, has exceeded official fleet reduction targets and so has less ground to cover according to the Commission.

Responding to the fierce anger the plan has provoked throughout Europe, Ms Bonino has stressed that cuts do not have to be achieved exclusively through fleet reduction, but that they can be met

partially through curbs such as forcing fishing boats to tie up in port for a minimum number of days. However, the more emotive option of breaking up trawlers is considered by Brussels to be the most verifiable and permanent way to cut overall fishing activity.

Ms Bonino insists that Britain should take its problem with "quota hoppers" to the ongoing Maastricht Treaty review negotiations. But she has warned that the depletion of fish stocks is too alarming for the cuts to be delayed.

Ms Bonino's plan is based on independent scientific assessments which will be challenged by Britain today. The Commission has repeatedly blamed Britain for contributing to the "quota hopping" problem by failing, until recently, to provide the aid needed to trigger EU subsidies for those in the fishing industry wanting to lay up their vessels. In the absence of other incentives they have tended to fall for the option of selling off their licences to Spanish or Dutch boat owners.

Officials in Britain said the UK accepted there were too many boats chasing too few fish, but rejected out of hand the scale of the cuts being proposed, as well as the Commission's calculations on past decommissioning targets.

Briain has also said that it would want to see limits on the number of days those in the industry can put to sea, made an integral part of the plan.

The Commission admits that the proposed cuts will lead to a number of job losses, but it has promised cash-aid to cushion the blow, that is worth £1.9bn. Brussels also claims that because fishing vessels will increase their efficiency by 2 per cent a year, the real scale of the cuts will be less than 30 per cent.

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news

Clarke banks on purchasing power

DIANE COYLE
Economics Editor

The Government can win the election if it fights it on the economy, according to Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer. He might be right.

The sales figures published each week by the John Lewis department stores could turn out to be a better guide to Conservative election prospects than the opinion polls. Some Tory voters prefer to keep quiet about their allegiance, biasing the polls, but there is no disguising the fact that consumers are spending more freely than at any time since the end of the Lawson boom.

The pace of the retail recovery during the next six months could make all the difference to the election result, assuming the Government holds on until May. For consumer confidence

'Most experts do not think the late 1990s will be a repeat of the late 1980s'

is one of two key influences on voting intentions, along with negative equity in housing, according to research by the City of London investment bank, Lehman Brothers.

According to the latest figures, the volume of high street sales grew at the fastest rate since early 1989 in the year to August. Food sales have been virtually flat for the past 12 months. The booming areas are clothing and household goods.

Most economists think this happy state of affairs will continue for the next year or so. But, cautiously, they do not think the late 1990s will be a repeat of the late 1980s when sales growth touched 8 per cent at the peak of the boom.

"It is being driven by fundamentals, not froth, this time," says Geoffrey Dicks, an economist at NatWest Markets. He predicts that consumer spending will grow by the same amount in 1996 and 1997 as it did in 1988 alone, making the

Nineties boom only half the boom of the Eighties.

The fundamental influence is how fast consumers' purchasing power is improving. This depends on their pay after inflation and taxes, which, thanks to April's income tax cuts, is currently growing at nearly 4 per cent a year.

Falling unemployment is likely to take pay settlements a bit higher next year, while more income tax cuts announced in next month's Budget would provide another boost. But nobody expects anything dramatic — certainly not the 6 to 7 per cent real wage growth of a decade ago.

City economists are cautious creatures, however. They all failed to predict the 1980s boom despite rising earnings and tax cuts.

One reason many think this pre-election boom will be different is that much of last decade's froth was financed on tick. Borrowing rose sharply thanks to deregulation of the terms on which building societies could lend. Big mortgages and loans for consumer goods backed by the security of borrowers' homes injected billions of pounds of extra spending into the economy.

It is just possible that there is a 1990s parallel to that financial deregulation. The rush by building societies and now the Norwich Union to join the stockmarket will put shares worth about £18bn into the hands of borrowers and policyholders next year. If we were all spent that would add about 4 per cent to total consumer expenditure.

There is a chance of faster spending growth," admits economist David Mackie from the investment bank JP Morgan. But he adds: "I think people still remember how badly these things can go wrong."

It puts the Government in a bit of a dilemma. The lessons of the past point to running a cautious economic policy now: consumer spending is so clearly picking up. There is no case for even modest tax cuts putting more money into pay packets and there probably is a need for an increase in interest rates. But a roaring consumer and housing boom is exactly what is required to boost the Tories' poll prospects.

WHOSE BOOM?



The economy is the key front in the election battle and may now be starting to go the Government's way. No Chancellor for a generation has delivered such a favourable set of economic indicators in time for the campaign. In a series starting today,

The Independent looks at how far the recovery will go.



Toasting success: The rapid growth of theme pubs such as this Weatherspoons bar in Deansgate, Manchester, is a sign of more optimistic times. Photograph: Howard Barlow

Themed pubs at heart of high-street gold rush

**NIGEL COPE and
TOM STEVENSON**

There is no doubt that the leisure and retailing businesses on the receiving end of consumer spending are feeling a lot more optimistic than they have for years.

The clearest sign of the times is the explosive growth of themed pubs and restaurants, and the increasingly frenetic rush by big companies to grab a slice of the action.

The takeover of the Pelican group of French brasserie-style restaurants by Whitbread for £133m was quickly followed by

a £100m bid by Rank for the Tom Cobleigh chain of pubs.

Both companies have thrived on the rapid spread of eating-out which in less than a decade has transformed a visit to a restaurant from an expensive treat to weekly, almost routine event.

According to figures from researchers at the Henley Centre the market for eating-out has grown from £16.2bn a year in 1992 to more than £20bn. Their expectation is that by 2000 we will be spending almost £30bn a year on eating out.

That has caused a revolution in the British pub sector, where the dingy boozers of a decade

ago are fast being transformed into friendly drinking and eating places designed to attract families, and women.

Hotels, too, are flourishing — especially in London. A renaissance in the capital's tourist industry is driving occupancy and room rates higher than at any point since the Gulf war.

In the retail market, recent profits reported by Oasis, Moss Bros, Austin Reed and Tesco reflect rising sales and, in some cases, customers trading up to more expensive items.

But this is not yet the 1980s revisited. Consumers may be

spending more but they are more careful about how they spend, and on what. As Rowland Gee, the managing director of Moss Bros, said: "It is still a very challenging market. People are much more cautious."

Thorntons, the confectionery chain that fell on hard times after the last boom, now admits times have changed. "It was easy

in the retail business during the Eighties," said the company's new chief executive, Roger Pafford. "Now you have to have the right products in exactly the right size shop in exactly the right place."

But for every success story such as Next, John Lewis and

Tesco, there is a tale of hardship as suffered by House of Fraser, WH Smith and Kwik Save.

One reason is price. Shoppers want value for their money — not just low prices. John Lewis's slogan, "Never knowingly undersold", is perfect for the current climate. Sales in its department stores are soaring.

Branding is another factor. In more frugal times it is retailers with the best names, such as Boots, and Marks & Spencer that prosper. Next — one of the high street's best performers — has refocused its brand after losing its way at the beginning of the Nineties. So has Habitat.

Laura Ashley is attempting to rebuild an identity.

Demographic change is also playing a part. With an ageing population, retailers who serve a slightly older demographic group stand to gain. The signs are already there, with good figures last week from Moss Bros and Austin Reed.

The best retailers are also developing increasingly dominant positions in their sectors. The gap between the best and the rest is growing. For example, while many of its rivals struggle, Dixons is powering ahead in the buoyant sales of multimedia PCs.

NOT QUITE BOOMING



Air-traffic privatisation put on the back burner

**COLIN BROWN CHIEF
Chief Political Correspondent**

Privatisation of air-traffic control has been put back on the agenda by the Government as part of the Treasury's attempts to raise finance to pay for cuts in the Budget.

The plan was dropped when it was proposed a year ago but Sir George Young, the Transport Secretary, is willing to follow the US in privatising the service and has dismissed fears about safety implications.

It would require legislation and could not be done before the election but is part of a list of privatisations, including the Royal Mail and London Underground, being studied for after the election.

Cabinet sources said a battle is looming over public-spending cuts of up to £5bn to allow some tax cuts to go ahead. "It will be very tight. There will be blood

on the floor," said one minister. The Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, who will chair the EDX committee of the Cabinet this week, damped hopes of tax cuts in his conference speech last week but ministers still expect some reductions. He will review the scope for cuts with his Treasury team on Friday at Dorney Wood, the chancellor's grace-and-favour residence.

Another source said: "None of the spending bids have been settled yet." The main targets are the roads programme, defence, social security, and prison-building.

Michael Portillo, the Defence Secretary, said on the *Jonathan Dimbleby* programme yesterday that he hoped the Chancellor would still have

room to make cuts if it was prudent to do so. He is ready to sell the Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall but is prepared to resist more cuts. The build-

ing needs refurbishing and will be sold to a private-sector bidder with a lease-back arrangement to the Government to pay for the work.

This is planned for the Treasury building across Whitehall, where the private owner will be allowed to keep most of the property for use as offices or a possible hotel. The MOD building, which has a communications bunker, cannot be broken up for security reasons.

Mr Portillo blames the Treasury for failing to recognise the sensitivity of the armed forces over the sale of their married quarters, which caused a row in the summer. That will raise £1.6bn, with £100m being ploughed back into refurbishment of the homes.

He will argue that his defence budget has made a big contribution to tax cuts, and cannot be squeezed any more.

But the Treasury can point

out that he has had the go-ahead, against Mr Clarke's wishes, for some big defence orders, with the Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft, and two new missiles for the RAF, including a "tank-buster" whose role is being questioned.

More cuts would outrage Tory MPs. Keith Mans, chairman of the Tory backbench defence committee, says in the current issue of the *House Magazine*: "The stability that the services now require should mean, in my view, no more defence cuts..." MPs will be debating defence for the next two days in the Commons.

Public-sector pay is being squeezed tightly by the Chancellor, who has written to all pay-review bodies, insisting on a freeze unless rises can be paid for out of productivity. All departments have been told to cut running costs by 12 per cent over the next three years.

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Millennium post highlights doubts

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

The man given the job of overseeing the building and running of the millennium exhibition planned for Greenwich in south-east London, has been appointed on only a three-month contract, because of continued uncertainty over the project.

Barry Hartop, chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency, has been seconded from the Welsh Office to the millennium exhibition. Despite the fact the exhibition is due to be built over the next three years,

his contract is for just three months initially, with the option to return to the WDA if the event fails to get off the ground.

Mr Hartop is to run the operating company set up to run the mammoth celebration together. Chaired by Robert Ayling, the British Airways chief, it is expected to be called Millennium Central. It will get cash from the Millennium Commission from National Lottery receipts and from private commercial sponsors.

But doubts continue to be expressed in Whitehall about the slow progress of the project.

See 11.10.152

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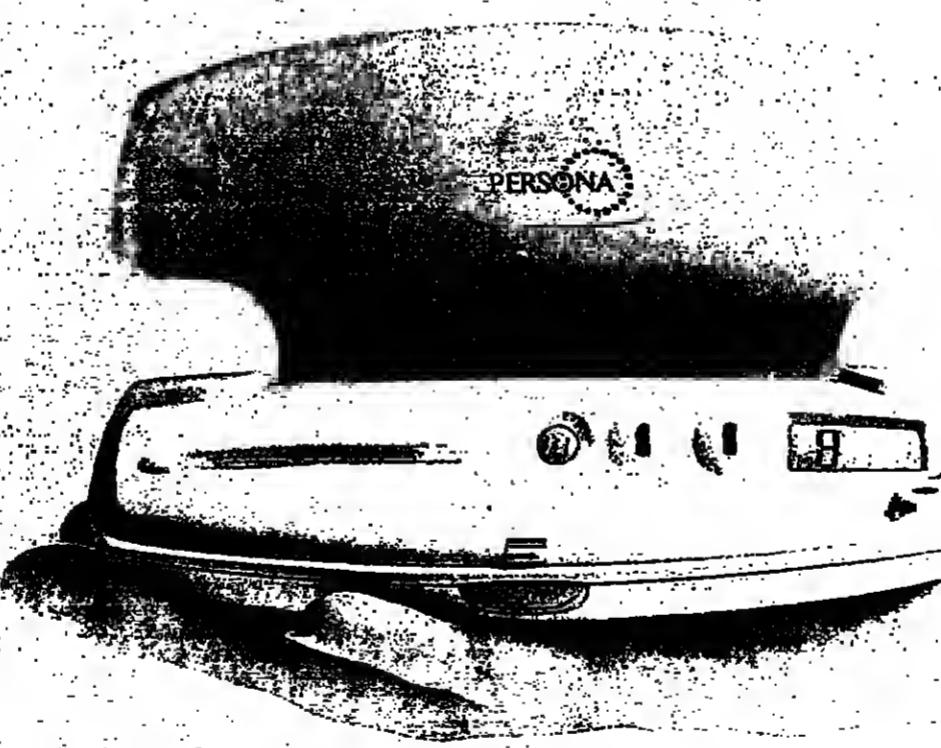
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Kurdistan: Civil war resumes as city is retaken

PUK turns the tables on allies of Saddam

PATRICK COCKBURN
Recently in Sulaymaniyah

In a counter-offensive marking the resumption of the Kurdish civil war, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan yesterday recaptured Sulaymaniyah, the second-largest city in Kurdistan, from which it was driven a month ago.

The speed and success of the counter-attack over the weekend by the PUK, led by Jalal Talabani, may indicate that it is receiving strong support from Iran. Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), said in a radio broadcast that Iran had launched "a brutal invasion" backed by the PUK.

Mr Talabani's forces began by taking the border towns of Mowat and Feyman in northern and eastern Sulaymaniyah province, close to the Iranian border. At 4am yesterday the PUK took Sulaymaniyah, from which the KDP had reportedly withdrawn several hours earlier. In a statement the PUK said there had been "a spontaneous uprising" by local people.

"The area from the Iranian border deep into Iraqi Kurdistan is now in Talabani's bands," a source in the UN Co-ordinator's office in Baghdad was quoted as saying. He said that all UN staff in Sulaymaniyah were safe and the city was calm. It apparently fell without any armed struggle, he said, adding: "It is just a new day, KDP is out and PUK is in." Yesterday we had yellow flags, today we have green ones."

The resumption of fighting will further weaken the Kurds. The sudden collapse of the PUK last month after Mr Barzani called in the aid of the Iraqi army to help him capture Arbil, the Kurdish capital, appeared to have brought an end to the civil war in Kurdistan.



which broke out in 1994. If the PUK now presses on, it is likely once more to turn to the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

In Damascus, Bayan Jibril, a representative of the Shia Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which is aligned with the PUK, confirmed in a statement yesterday that the Kurdish group plans to take Arbil, saying the town "will be in the hands of the PUK fighters within a few days".

UN sources say that Mr Talabani's forces have captured Choman and there are reports of fighting near Dokan and Koi Sanjaq, well to the west of Sulaymaniyah city. This means that the KDP's rout this weekend has been almost as complete as the defeat of the PUK a month ago.

It is unlikely, however, that the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein will stand by and watch the defeat of his new ally Mr Barzani by forces friendly with Iran. An official statement, after a meeting of the Iraqi leadership, urged the two groups to settle their differences through talks, and warned against "dealing with the foreigner", a reference to the PUK's links with Iran.

It is possible that Iran has decided to take a more aggressive stance towards Mr Barzani because of events in Afghanistan. On the heels of its setback in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranian leadership saw the Taliban, allegedly allied to Pakistan and hostile to Tehran, capture Kabul in late September. Under pressure on both its eastern and western frontiers Iran may have decided to strike back.

There is another reason why the KDP rolled up so quickly. It never really established control of much of Sulaymaniyah province. One estimate puts its available forces at 30,000 – and these are swallowed up in the roadless interior of Kurdistan.

Driving north from Sulaymaniyah in the direction of Choman on the Iranian border two weeks ago there were no KDP checkpoints in the high mountains.

The political and military vacuum was symbolised by a 155mm heavy artillery piece, abandoned with a flat tyre by the PUK in their flight on 9 September. Neither the victorious KDP nor the defeated PUK had the confidence to pick up this valuable piece of hardware.

The KDP was visibly overstretched. Not only were there few checkpoints away from the main cities, but there was little military traffic on the roads. In Choman, a huddle of houses beside a stream which marks the border with Iran, the regional PUK commander was confident that he still had 85 per cent of his forces and could counter-attack when he had regrouped.

Nevertheless the speed with which the PUK has reconquered most of Sulaymaniyah province is probably the result of strong Iranian support. This in turn is likely to lead the KDP to turn once again to Baghdad. Neither Iran nor Iraq are willing to see the other's client win a clear victory.



Holy war: Taliban fighters load a rocket launcher yesterday, 10km north of Kabul, in the ongoing battle with forces loyal to the ousted Afghan government. Photograph: Reuter

ADRIAN BRIDGE
Central Europe Correspondent

The rise and rise of Austria's popular far-right leader, Jörg Haider, appeared to have been convincingly confirmed last night, with early projections showing sweeping gains for his Freedom Party in elections to the European Parliament in the Vienna city council.

Early exit polls in the European vote gave the Freedom Party 28.1 per cent, a sharp increase on its 22 per cent showing in last year's general election, putting it only just behind the 29.7 per cent apiece credited to Austria's two dominant parties, the Social Democrats and conservative People's Party.

The result was a personal triumph for Mr Haider, a man who once praised Hitler's employment policies and who only last year commended the "decency" of Waffen SS veterans. At the same time, it represented the worst ever showing for Chancellor Franz Vranitzky's Social Democrats, who were poised to lose their absolute majority in the Vienna council for the first time since 1945.

Mr Haider's success in the European Parliament vote came on the back of the widespread disillusionment felt by many Austrians since joining the European Union at the beginning of last year.

Blaming Brussels for the loss of thousands of jobs, Mr Haider promised that he would try to negotiate a net reduction in Austria's contributions to EU coffers. He also promised a referendum on whether to join a single European currency, a move he personally opposes. "We are paying too much [to Brussels] and getting too little back," Mr Haider said earlier this month. "The EU is taking too much of our money and ordinary Austrians are digging deep into their pockets."

In a bid to meet the convergence criteria for the single currency, Chancellor Vranitzky's government earlier this year passed a deeply unpopular cost-cutting austerity budget.

But disillusionment with his government, and the cosy monopoly on power enjoyed by the Social Democrats and People's Party since the war runs much deeper. Despite – or perhaps because of – his flirtations with far-right and even Nazi ideologies, Mr Haider has attracted ever more followers since taking over as leader of the Freedom Party 10 years ago. At the time, support for the party stood at just 5 per cent. Now, if the projections are confirmed, it is nearly 30 per cent.

Although the two big parties can still team up to exclude him from government, his declared aim to break the mould of Austrian politics – and to become Chancellor by 1998 – looks ever more attainable.

Condo Commando mobilises his blue-rinse army

DANIEL USORNE
Captain Village, Florida

Dressed to relax in matching cotton shirt and shorts, Amadeo Trinchetti – Trinch to everyone who knows him – does not look especially intimidating. He is a 78-year-old with heart trouble. Appearances can deceive, however; he is also a "Condo Commando", one of the best.

The nickname makes Trinch wince – "I don't think it's very flattering" – but the image of warfare is not entirely misplaced. In retirement condominium complexes in Florida, Trinch and others like him are organising fellow residents into going to the polls next month.

And they are sending them into battle for a single cause: the re-election of Bill Clinton and the preservation of federal assistance to the old, which, they contend, would be slashed by Bob Dole.

Trinch's pool of voters is the 15,000-strong population of Century Village, a closed retirement community near Miami, a collection of low white blocks with names like Richmond, Upminster, Swansea and Berkshire. There are 14 swimming pools and 47 tennis courts but it is not a place for the affluent. Admission to the Saturday-night dance in the Village Club House is 50 cents; disco

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

night on Monday is a quarter. Trinch calculates that 12,500 of the residents are registered to vote. "I get a little over-enthusiastic about this but I think that those, about 12,400 will vote for the President," Trinch, a former New York nightclub

owner who has been a Democrat for 20 years but in 1992 Mr Clinton lost to George Bush by a bare 100,000 votes.

Polls suggest Mr Clinton is ahead in the state by about 5 per cent. And the difference is apparently being made by retired people, almost a quarter of Florida's population. A poll of likely voters in the state aged 65 or over suggested 49 per cent would vote Clinton, over 40 per cent for Dole. That is the widest gap in the President's favour of any age group in the state.

In the Club House room, the reasons for Mr Dole's difficulties become apparent. Six ladies are playing canasta. At 73, Mr Dole could theoretically take his seat here but at the very mention of his name, these gentle faces suddenly go sour.

"He is just too old," ventures Jeannette. She is not deflected by the observation that she perhaps is a touch older than Mr Dole. "That may be," she retorts, "but I don't want to try and run the country."

He is just too old," ventures Jeannette. She is not deflected by the observation that she perhaps is a touch older than Mr Dole. "That may be," she retorts, "but I don't want to try and run the country."

Above all, there is the claim denied by Republicans – that Mr Dole would ravage social-security and Medicare programmes. Fear of such cuts is expressed by all these women, most of whom are on modest fixed incomes.

People say that this is like a block vote, but it isn't," Trinch insists. "We vote together because we believe in the same things. We are from the Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy era. Most of us lived through two wars and the Holocaust. We are all concerned about our Medicare. And we are worried about the education of our children and our grandchildren."

He labels Mr Dole as "treasonous". "We are both veterans, but for me, self-preservation is about today and about living my life in dignity."



Bogeymen: Florida's elderly are fearful of Dole's policies

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Scheming French bridle at a bridge too foreign

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

Anyone from Britain who has driven the spectacular "alternative" route to the South of France, via Clermont-Ferrand, the Massif Central and the partially completed A75 motorway to Languedoc-Roussillon, had two reasons for rejoicing this summer. Plans for the last, key section of the motorway - a viaduct to bypass the city of Millau - are in their final stages, and the contract for the project has been won by the British firm Foster and Partners.

But three months after its victory, in open competition with four other firms, all French, there is a hitch. Political and professional opposition in France means the result could be ignored; the final decision is said to rest with President

Jacques Chirac. The Millau stretch of the motorway was always going to be controversial.

The town is at the conjunction of two valleys. The descent from the north and the ascent to the south afford views of mountains, forests and pastures, and frustration for motorists seething behind lorries.

The beauty of the surroundings meant any road bigger or straighter than the present one would be contested on environmental grounds, however much Millau might be suffocated by traffic. It is not the decision to complete the motorway, nor the route chosen, that is causing most difficulties, but that the contract has gone to a foreign firm. Referees to aesthetic "shortcomings" of the design spill out occasionally but objectors are working almost entirely through the cor-



Attention span: How the viaduct will look if the winning British design is used. But opposition in France means the result could be ignored.

ridors of power. The contract has still not been finalised.

From the Millau office that is the hub of the A75 planning, Georges Gillet, head of operations, insists the "sensitivity" of the current stage of the contract is not a French-British problem, but, though he declines to say directly, a "French-French" problem, and one France is likely to face increasingly as European markets become more open and competitive.

The brief, he said, was kept as wide as possible and was more than a simple design com-

petition. The shortlisted firms had to decide first which of five proposed routes and bridge types they found most appropriate and design accordingly.

The Foster design is for a 2,500m viaduct west of Millau; its tallest supports will be higher than the Eiffel Tower. A model resides in a glass case in the foyer of the Millau office.

The official announcement in July said Foster had won on a combination of design, technical and environmental grounds and with a cost "significantly" (said to be 30 per cent) less than

most of the other submissions. Mr Gillet landed the design as little short of a marvel.

However, given the influential opposition that has subsequently made itself felt, how was the British firm able to win?

The deliberations of the jury are secret, and all that is known is that the decision was made by "an absolute majority" (ie it was not unanimous). But one factor may have been decisive.

In the competition to design the Millau viaduct, all the rules about public-works tendering, including appointment of in-

ternational advisers and a mixed jury, appear to have been observed. As scandals in Paris and elsewhere show, this does not always happen, and it may have owed something to the fact that Mr Gillet, as design and works head for the whole of the A75's southern sector, was, unusually, given authority which passed across four regional boundaries. The pressure that could be exerted by politicians and local officials hope it will become an attraction in its own right and not just a six-lane traffic conveyor.

Photograph: Foster and Partners

From officials at the Department of Road Transport, word is that the contract is being drawn up "as a matter of priority". Pressed about mooted difficulties, they concede there is opposition - "from some French architects" - but insist that the competition result stands. In London, Foster and Partners acknowledge the delicacy of the project at its current stage but clearly hope the opposition will be overcome. Work on the Great Millau Viaduct is due to start in 1998, for completion, with the A75, in 2001.

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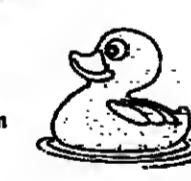
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Archivist of atrocity who lives to fight for justice

Sanski Most — Beside the Crni road, there is a massive hole in the earth, half-filled with mud from the overflowing River Sana. They have already taken the corpses from the mass grave and buried them on the soft green ridge to the north, where a sea of rain-soaked flowers covers their very last resting place.

But 10 miles away, in the courthouse of Sanski Most, Judge Adil Dragomanovic ensures that the Muslim dead of western Bosnia are still with us. He has photographs of each decaying corpse, documents and money that the victims had hidden in their shirts and blouses before the Serb executioners shot them into the pits. He has opened two mass graves and now plans to open another 13. In his files are more than 5,000 documents captured from the Serbs in the military collapse of 1995 when Sanski Most was retaken by government forces, a terrible record of the holocaust visited upon Muslims over four years, in the words of the killers.

Judge Dragomanovic is a driven man, intense, his narrative running in different directions as he remembers another atrocity, the details of another execution. He pulls open a cardboard file and takes out a piece of paper dated 25 May, 1992. "The action starts," a Serb militiaman has written in his bio, "...there is no retreat or halting until surrender. No prisoners to be taken with weapons..." It is the Serbs' own record of their assault on the Muslims of Sanski Most, the orders that will lead many of them to the mass graves. Then the judge produces a school notebook and hands it to me. A Serb called Tade Vukic has written on one line: "32 bodies buried - Krusovo." The remark is followed by a list of numbers and prices in Serbian dinars and a reference to a bulldozer. The note is addressed to a Serb official called Rasula.

Only after a few seconds does the meaning of this awful document become clear to me. The number represents

BACK TO BOSNIA

Robert Fisk
reports on a
survivor of ethnic
cleansing in the
series from former
Yugoslavia, a year
after the ceasefire

Vukic's workers. The dinars are their pay for the day. They have been using a bulldozer to bury dead Muslims. This is an expenses bill by the chief mass graves digger of Sanski Most.

"They killed 24 of my family and I survived by accident," Judge Dragomanovic says. "So it

is my duty to my dead family and to all our dead to catalogue these terrible crimes. It will take years. I will be doing this for the rest of my life. I will go on searching through the documents to prove the crimes and the genocide perpetrated against the Muslims, and for all the nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"We must find the missing persons so that we can mark their graves and find out who murdered them and find these criminals and prosecute them. I have thousands of documents at home. I read them every night. I sleep with them and live with them. This I must do as a duty to my people."

When Judge Dragomanovic



spreads the photographs on his desk, even the Pakistani policeman from the UN's international police sitting next to me drew in his breath. Each picture showed drunken, armed men, some bearded, some holding machine guns in the air, several wearing black bands round their foreheads or foot-long bushy beards. One older man had on his head a tall black military hat decorated with Serbian eagles. They were celebrating their victory, these drunken Serbs, eyes joyful, smiles as broad as the knives some of them also carried. Here, in these pictures, were the ethnic cleansers of western Bosnia, snapped by their comrades at the height of their slaughter.

"Do you understand?" Judge Dragomanovic asked me. "Do you know how we feel about what these people did? You know, we have just identified a mass grave near Hrcka village in which 19 young men were buried under a wall. We know they were taken to the house for what the Serbs called 'interrogation' and that a Serb called Vlada Vrkes promised they would be exchanged for civilians from another town. But when he left, four Serbs — locals from the same village as the Muslims — just shot them all down with automatic rifles. The bodies were thrown into the house and the building was set afire and the

wall collapsed. We will exhume their bones in a few days."

No one interrupts Judge Dragomanovic. It would be sacrilegious to do so. "We opened a grave at Sasina and found 65 bodies, aged from 17 to 70. One of them was a woman. They were all killed on Arkan's orders

In one grave we found 65 bodies, aged from 17-70'

and the killing was carried out by a man called Nedeljk who lives in Banja Luka now." Dragomanovic knows I am returning across the old front line to Banja Luka in an hour's time and his voice grows soft and menacing, a frozen smile covering his face.

"If you see him in the Bosna Hotel tonight, will you be good enough to tell him to come to Sanski Most? Tell him I personally invite him. Tell him there are nine rivers in Sanski Most and I invite him to come fishing with me. Tell him I will send my personal car for him." There is an absolute silence in the judge's room, which seems to have grown colder.

Another file is spread on the

table and another set of photographs. "They killed 500 people on the Vrkojje Bridge in 1992," he said. "They were killed in groups and then the Serbs destroyed the bridge on top of the bodies. There was a survivor, so we were able to find 28 corpses in the hole we dug by the bridge but more than 400 corpses drifted off down the River Sana. We cannot find most of them because they decayed and their bones are on the bottom of the river."

In a break, almost weary aside, Judge Dragomanovic just happens to mention that another 200 Muslims are thought to be buried close to the bridge. In all, he believes 3,000 Muslims were massacred in Sanski Most and 10,000 around Prijedor, which is still under Serb control and to which Judge Dragomanovic and his team of forensic scientists — six Muslims, two Serbs and two Croats — have no access.

Judge Dragomanovic is staring now, at my face. "I have seen you before," he said. "You came with some Europeans and a young woman when I was a prisoner of the Serbs in Manjaca concentration camp. You took photographs and I tried to make sure I was in your pictures because I thought this would help save me. Other journalists came. You all saved my life. Thank you." I had taken dozens of pictures at Manjaca in 1992. I had a faint recollection of a smaller, much thinner man with Judge Dragomanovic's features.

"Well, I did survive and I live to remember," he says. "I have a peaceful nature and I still cannot understand the mind of the people who did these terrible things. But to survive is what is important, to be a witness. It is very difficult to kill a hundred people at once. Someone will be wounded and live. And he is the one who tells us where the graves are and who did it. Someone always survives a massacre."

■ Tomorrow — the dark secret of Banja Luka's Police Station No 3?



Vale of tears: The Drina Valley viewed through the window of a ruined house, where ethnic cleansing programmes killed thousands of Muslims

Photograph: Robert Fisk

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Veteran Chinese dissident flees

STEPHEN VINES
Hong Kong

One of China's longest-established dissidents, Wang Xizhe, is reliably understood to have evaded arrest and to have been smuggled to Hong Kong. Sources associated with the secret Operation Yellow Bird underground escape route said he was preparing to leave for the United States.

His wife, Su Jiang, said yesterday that friends had told her that her husband was in Hong Kong but that she had not

been in direct contact with him. Mr Wang is seen as a formidable opponent because he was a factory worker and the Chinese Communist Party is particularly sensitive to opposition from workers.

Dissident sources in Hong Kong said he started to plan his escape after last week's arrest and sentencing of fellow activist Liu Xizhe. Mr Liu was sent to a labour camp for three years for writing a letter with Mr Wang which called for stronger action against Japan in the dispute over the Diaoyu islands. More

sensitively, the letter accused the Chinese Communist Party of reneging on pledges to give the right of self-determination to the people of Tibet and urged talks with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader.

Many Chinese dissidents avoid talking about Tibet because they know protests on the subject are likely to provoke a sharp response. Last December, China's best-known dissident, Wei Jingchen, was accused of attempting to "divide the motherland" by questioning China's rule in Tibet. This formed a key

indictment in a trial which ended with a 14-year jail sentence.

Mr Wang has served two long prison sentences for political crimes. He was jailed in 1974 after putting up a poster in Guangzhou, southern China which protested at the repression in the last years of Mao Zedong's rule. He was re-arrested in 1981 on charges of spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda and forming an opposition group. Some four years of his 14-year sentence were spent in punitive solitary confinement.

He was released two years

before the end of his sentence in 1993 but remained defiant, saying he would prefer to go back to jail rather than lose his freedom of speech. Unlike most dissidents he is from the south of the country, where opposition activity is more confined.

Yellow Bird has smuggled hundreds of dissidents out of China since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Up to 800 people are believed to have passed through Hong Kong since then.

The organisation is a curious amalgam of democracy activists

and triad gang members who smuggle other people out of China purely for financial gain.

At the height of its activities it

appeared to have supporters

strategically located in the Chinese government and security services.

Meanwhile, in Peking, Wang

Dan, one of the leaders of the 1989 Tiananmen Square

protests, is expected to go on trial this week, accused of plotting to subvert the government. He

is one of the few leaders whom

Yellow Bird failed to get out of

the country.

African sage who won the hearts of the French

Imagine that Hastings Banda, instead of turning Malawi into one of the world's nastiest dictatorships in his declining years, had bowed out of politics in his mid-70s and retired to Scotland.

Perhaps he chose to live in,

say, North Berwick, a seaside town east of Edinburgh and birthplace, for the purpose of

this fantasy, of a woman he met

and married while at Edinburgh University. Would the

merchants of North Berwick

have decorated their shop windows with his country's flags, on

the occasion of his 90th birthday? Would pictures of the

former president, and posters

wishing him well, have lined the streets? Would North Berwick's "Banda Centre" have honoured

him with readings from his literary oeuvre, while children

of the town gathered around him and his wife to sing "Happy Birthday"?

It is not easy to imagine. But

something like this happened in

the Normandy town of Vernon

last week, on the 90th birthday

of the former Senegalese presi-

dent Léopold Senghor.

The assembled schoolchild-

ren were told that they would

soon be in the presence of one

of the wisest men in the world,

then the beating of the tocs-in

began and the dimunitive sage

appeared.

As he sat next to his wife,

Panlette, a daughter of Vernon

whom he married in 1957, the

mayor of the town, Jean-Claude

Rouau, said the party was a

"family occasion" and a chance

for the community to recognise

its most celebrated son. There

were poems - Mr Senghor's -

and the children sang the

Senegalese national anthem,

written by Mr Senghor.

Once Britain started to pull

out of Africa, around 1960, it

was as if it could not cut loose

from the awkward empire

quickly enough. France was

keen to retain its influence

over its old colonies, however,

and Mr Senghor is a living

example of the different way

that relationship developed.

He read French at the Sor-

bонne between the wars, making

friends with Jean-Paul

Sartre, Albert Camus and the

Caribbean nationalist writer

Aimé Césaire. He was intro-

duced to socialist ideas by his

friend Georges Pompidou, the

future president. Together with

Césaire and another black

intellectual, Léon Damas, from

Guyana, he developed the idea

of "négritude".

This attempt to describe the

contribution of black African

cultures to world culture - without

black Africans, civilisation

would "lack the rhythm-section

of its choir", he said - was a

direct precursor of the disci-

pline of Black Studies and such

Local Hero



Léopold Senghor

1960s slogan as "black is beautiful". In 1963 he became the first black man to be elected to the Académie Française.

Perhaps there is something about Mr Senghor that appeals to that corner of the French soul that likes the idea of a philosopher-king. But he was also a philosopher-action man: he served in the French infantry during the Second World War and was captured by the Germans.

When he was released he joined the Resistance and it was probably these experiences that diverted him from his intellectual calling to a political one. Having helped to lay the intellectual foundations of African independence, and having played a key role in persuading De Gaulle that the African colonies could become independent within a French community of nations without things falling apart, he became in 1960 the first President of Senegal. A Christian, he led the mainly Muslim country for the next 20 years, being re-elected twice and stepping down voluntarily on 31 December 1980.

Celebrations in his home village of Joal, 130km from Dakar, last Wednesday were led by his successor, President Abdou Diouf. "Senghor is of the race of empire-builders, a pathfinder, a guide," Mr Diouf said, announcing that the country's main airport and biggest football stadium would be named after him. "This child of Joal and of Africa, whom they call Senghor in faraway places, is a citizen of the world."

Another elaborate party is planned for Friday at the Paris headquarters of Unesco, where presidents Diouf and Chirac will pay tribute. Mr Senghor will not make the journey, being, in the words of Dorothee Lemouzic, director of Vernon's Senghor Centre, "very ill and, very old".

James Roberts

Why isn't Ian Paisley on
Thought for the Day?
Poly Tommies
Page 16

FREE Party Time!

Hutus flee gun raiders
About 20,000 Hutu refugees from Burundi fled their camp in eastern Zaire after it was attacked by armed men, aid officials said. The assailants were believed to be Banyamulenge, ethnic Tutsi recently ordered out of Zaire by provincial authorities. Four refugees were killed and six wounded in the attack on Rusingiro camp, a UN source in Burundi said. Bujumbura - Reuter

Hebron pull-out talks delayed
Talks between the Israelis and the Palestine Liberation Organisation on a long-postponed redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron, set to resume in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba today, have been delayed until tomorrow, an Israeli spokesman said. The delay was suggested by the US peace envoy Dennis Ross, who has been mediating in the talks, which began last week. The PLO said it had not been told of the delay. Jerusalem - Reuter

Crowd backs abuse judge
About 1,000 people demonstrated outside Belgium's highest court in support of a judge and an examining magistrate leading inquiries into the child sex abuse and murder scandal.

The Cour de Cassation decided today whether Jean-Marc Connerot, the magistrate, and the public prosecutor Michel Borlet should be removed from the inquiry for accepting a free meal. Brussels - Reuter

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NZ parties haggle over the poll spoils

DAVID BARBER
Wellington

Winston Peters, who will decide New Zealand's next government after Saturday's inconclusive election, went to sea yesterday, keeping everyone guessing. Mr Peters, leader of the nationalist New Zealand First party, which holds the balance of power, took advisers sailing to discuss coalition strategy out of the spotlight.

His 17 MPs in the 120-seat Parliament meet tomorrow to discuss separate coalition talks with the conservative National Party and the Labour Party. Mr Peters, in line for the Deputy Prime Minister's post whoever he joins, said it could take weeks to negotiate a deal.

Neither National (44) nor Labour (37) won enough seats to govern alone in the first election held under the Mixed

Member Proportional (MMP) system. Labour has ruled out joining a grand coalition with the National Party.

Both Jim Bolger, the National leader and Prime Minister for the past six years, and the Labour leader, Helen Clark, said they were in the best position to form the next government, while acknowledging they would need NZ First's help.

Jim Anderton, leader of the NZ Alliance, which won 13 seats, said he would support Labour, while not joining a formal coalition, if it accepted certain Alliance policies.

Richard Prebble, head of the right-wing ACT NZ party, said his eight MPs would back the Nationals. He said Mr Bolger, who is also backed by a lone United NZ party MP, could lead a minority government for the next three years.

While Mr Anderton and Ms



Plotting a course: Winston Peters, whose New Zealand First party holds the balance of power, leaving yesterday for a discussion on coalition tactics. Photograph: Reuter

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Sex, drugs and the limits of liberal sense

Porn on the telly, sex on the Net, drugs in your next-door neighbour's window box... where will all end? To hear the outcry, you would think we were all slithering downwards into a mire of vile vice. Allow a little sex and drugs and we are off on a slippery slope. Before long we are skidding perilously about on an oily sludge of depravity.

Only there is no slope, and it isn't slippery. Just because people grow cannabis at home doesn't mean they are destined to become heroin addicts. Just because pornographic movies are broadcast on satellite television, that does not mean we should fear an imminent social collapse into an orgy of rape, abuse and indecency.

We all do it: that is, we accept unthinkingly the idea that one small step inevitable leads to a second, larger one; as if a single whisky is always followed by a double. But it isn't true. Of so many of these questions – drugs, pornography, acceptable sexual behaviour, swearing in public, drinking – we decide as a society where to draw the line. Sometimes the line turns out to be the wrong place – as it did in 1966 on the obscenity law, for example. So we move the line, either by legislation, or, more often, simply by tolerating change. It is ludicrous to pretend that every liberalising shift will unleash immoral forces that threaten to overwhelm us all. Slapdash slippery-slope

arguments often end up as a feeble defence of impractical positions on social morality.

Take marijuana. The fact that so many people are now growing marijuana in their back gardens and hanging baskets should not bother anyone in the slightest, least of all the hard-pressed constabulary. In fact, it would be better to allow people to grow marijuana for their own consumption, since it undermines trade in a drug that is anyway less harmful to individual health than cigarettes and far less socially destructive than alcohol. The only serious social objection to marijuana is that the people who smoke it tend to sit around giggling insanely, but at least that's preferable to drunks who bray at tasteless jokes, leer at passing women, and threaten anyone who looks unimpressed.

Nor is there any reason to believe that liberalisation of soft drugs would legitimise and encourage hard drug use. Quite the contrary. By drawing the line in a sensible place (between relatively harmless recreational soft drugs and deeply dangerous hard drugs) rather than in a silly indefensible place (between nicotine and marijuana), we could do a lot to legitimise the law.

The same is true of porn on television. Why should Virginia Bottomley care what other adults want to watch, so long as it does her no harm at all? Where it is impossible for parents to control

access by their children, it is possible to see her problem. But broadcasting and personal computer technology allow all kinds of simple barriers that are more effective than a video shop owner and ID cards. There is a demand for sex on the telly, as Channel 5 is demonstrating by its professed desire to run a little light erotica in the wee hours. Is there any evidence that our European neighbours suffer from a more depraved lifestyle than we, simply because pornography is legally available?

Mrs Bottomley's opposition to the "squidgy diet of filth and degradation" available in Europe flows from the

same neurotic, uptight attitude that sex should be endured for England's sake. Porn is violent and grossly exploitative should be banned, not because it is "filthy" in the sexual sense, but because it hurts people. It obviously follows that pornography that uses children is doubly criminal. But that proves the point: we know where the line should be drawn, and it is not so hard to draw it. Drawing the line in the wrong place simply makes the law look foolish, and encourages perfectly normal people to step around it.

There is no slippery slope between willing erotica and violent videos.

Broadcasting consensual sex games will not encourage men to commit violent rapes. Nor is there immense public demand for sex on every channel at every hour of the day. If porn channels were available in Britain, there might be a flurry of interest at first; then when the novelty wore off, most of us would find far more interesting things to watch or do. With porn, just as with soft drugs, there is no welling tide behind the supposed floodgates. Those who enjoy the occasional joint or the odd erotic movie would be able to do so with greater ease, and without fear of prosecution. But legalising cannabis and porn channels would not be the trigger for sex and drugs to dominate all our lives. In fact, there is some reason for thinking that if we were to draw the line in the right place, people would become less excited about these subjects altogether.

Of course, there need to be laws that restrict our use of addictive substances, and our social and sexual interactions with each other. Laws that restrict our freedom of choice are fine in areas where we need protection from one another. No responsible adult wants to encourage a society that allows drug barons to prey on teenagers and push them into addictions that destroy their lives. Nor would they endorse the widespread distribution of material (sexual or non-sexual) that harms people or incites them to violence.

We just need to get the balance right. Stopping people doing things and watching things which harm nobody, and which huge swathes of people across the country regard as wholly acceptable, is wrong. As a certain eminent bairness, once prime minister, used to say: the nation does not need nannying.

Sir James and other curios

The BBC's latest fly-on-the-wall documentary, we learn today, is about the Victoria and Albert Museum – and it reveals an array of strange personalities, more curious than the museum's curios. Once every workplace had an oddball or two, enlivening everyone's employment and giving character to the place. But what with downsizing, nonconformists are often the first to go.

So where can misfits find a home? There's only so much room at the V&A. Well, they could always sign up for the Referendum Party. Any party that counts Sir James Goldsmith as its leader, opens its doors to Lord McAlpine, and then proves to be a potential haven for Geoffrey Boycott, clearly has space for everyone. But who would be a fly on that wall?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Withdrawal is no solution to Irish question

Sir: Tony Benn ("The answer to the Irish Question is British withdrawal", 9 October) maintains that John Hume, Gerry Adams and Albert Reynolds had succeeded in establishing a "genuine" IRA ceasefire and implicitly blames the British government for its breakdown by not allowing all-party talks.

The sad fact is that the IRA's cessation was never sanctioned by a General Army Convention – the only way a genuine or permanent ceasefire is allowed in the IRA's rules.

This "genuine" ceasefire did not end the IRA's campaign of beatings. These dramatically increased to keep Catholic communities in line and to deter informers. Nor did it end recruitment, advance planning and fund-raising – a postman in the North and a police officer in the South were murdered in foiled robberies.

Tony says Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland "live and work side by side, and always have done" and both suffer the ravages of bombing and unemployment, although he also says Unionists want the British troops to protect their privileges.

Only about 2 per cent of the province's pupils attend mixed schools. Most people live in near-homogeneous Catholic or Protestant areas. The peace lines dividing Catholics and Protestants have been added to in the past year. Significant numbers of people already have been ethnically cleansed out of mixed areas and the would worse if Tony's plans for the termination of jurisdiction were ever implemented.

Tony wants the Irish people, North and South, to determine their futures. This is the basis of Anglo-Irish diplomacy. Britain says it has no selfish interests and will facilitate a fair settlement. The Irish Republic maintains an irredentist claim to the North, although thankfully this has been somewhat contradicted by John Bruton's recent disavowal of selfish interests in the North and would be greatly accelerated by revision of its constitutional claim to sovereignty. The ultimate decision on the North's constitutional future (to which country, if any, it belongs), is left to the people of Northern Ireland, whose consent is upheld by both governments and all parties.

Confidence can be increased if both Governments renew their search for a fair deal in the North and between the peoples of these islands. An immediate priority is rapid moves towards a Bill of Rights or the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. This would symbolise firm commitments to guaranteeing everyone's human rights and generate confidence in constitutional politics.

At the same time, the Irish and British governments should urgently but calmly conduct a security review. As well as restoring all necessary security measures relaxed during the IRA ceasefire, they should seriously consider introducing investigating magistrates with wide-ranging powers to seek terrorist funding and find the directors of terrorist operations. Wire-tap evidence should also be admissible in courts.

Unless the two government co-operate closely in the search for political solutions and signal a new determination to combat terrorism, Northern Ireland could descend into civil war in which countless



people will die. The answer to the Irish question isn't a simple British withdrawal. It requires the continuing search for peace, reconciliation and an agreement which can be placed before the people of Ireland, North and South.

HARRY BARNES MP
*(Derbyshire North East, Lab)
House of Commons
London SW1*

Take a sniff at modern slurry

Sir: Do farms smell of medieval manure? (Letters, 7 October). Sometimes they do, and to a farmer it is good and redolent of fertility. The warmth and smell of the animal byre was probably the first domestic comfort.

However, Messrs Anderson and Davison should take a sniff at the pressure-barrel product of a modern dairy farm. This may be sprayed 25 feet into the air and carried downwind several hundred yards, enveloping homes and stock in a stinking cloud of yellow-brown droplets with heaven knows what microbiology.

I sympathise with my neighbours and friends the farmers. Machines have advanced faster than clean technology or common sense. Despite this sympathy I know that such a process would be illegal in any other industry.

By the way, medevial manure was different. Over-fertilised ryegrass is a bit deficient in roughage compared with the coarse grasses and herbs of the commons or the flowering stalks of bay.

JOHN EETHERINGTON
Solva, Pembrokeshire

Women's chance of a good pension

Sir: Helen Wilkinson ("The voter changes her mind", 10 October) lists pensions policy as one of the key issues concerning older women and likely to affect their voting behaviour. With twice as many women as men over pension age and women being four out of five of those dependent on income support, this is undoubtedly true. However, the question of pensions should concern young people, especially young women.

The DSS research on women and pensions published this summer showed how much ignorance, confusion and anxiety there is about pension provision. For example, 50 per cent of women aged 25-34 years expected to be worse off in retirement and a further 11 per cent did not know.

Only one in four those belonging to occupational schemes in this age group thought their pension would be enough to live on. Only 16 per cent had a personal pension plan (10 per cent had had one but had it no longer).

Some will benefit from their husbands' private pension (61 per cent of husbands belong to an occupational scheme and 35 per cent to a personal pension plan).

As a result of the Pension Act 1995 and proposals for further pension-splitting, women may benefit even if the marriage ends in divorce. Not all young women are "busy carving out careers", and even if they are, what happens

when they have children? Half of mothers with children under 10 years are not in paid employment, and many of those who are earn insufficient to contribute to a private pension. The state pension scheme will continue to be crucial to the welfare of the majority of women, bearing in mind also that women may spend a quarter of a lifetime on a pension. The private sector cannot provide adequate pensions for those with low or interrupted earnings.

One of the many virtues of Barbara Castle's scheme is that it values contributions to society in the form of caring within the family, as well as giving pensioners a share in rising prosperity. The party which can reward not only high achievers but also those who give priority to caring responsibilities should get the votes of women.

HILARY LAND
*Professor of Family Policy and Child Welfare
University of Bristol*

Tribal time warp
Sir: You show a photograph of a member of the Amazonian Mascho-Piro tribe which "is thought to have had no previous contact with the outside world" (11 October). Could someone please explain why this man appears to be wearing a khaki T-shirt, bright red bandana, fashionably cut underpants and – do my eyes deceive me – a watch?

ROBERT EAGLE
London W4

State is a threat to privacy, too

Sir: Lord Wakeham's recent statement ("Press faces tighter intrusion laws", 11 October) rightly questioned the effectiveness of self-regulation in the press. The European Convention on Human Rights recognises that press freedom is an essential component of a democratic society, but also that the state should protect the right to respect for private and family life. The law in this country should reflect both important rights by providing a right to privacy, subject, of course, to a public interest defence.

As chair of the Press Complaints Commission, Lord Wakeham is not concerned with the intrusions of privacy by the state itself. We believe that the privacy debate should not just focus on the treatment of celebrities by the press, but on the intrusions into the lives of ordinary people by state bodies, whether government departments, local authorities or the police. Lord Wakeham is wrong when he argues that nobody would benefit from statutory controls, as present such people simply have no remedy.

The High Court will shortly decide whether a Brentwood man can bring judicial review proceedings against his local authority for passing to the media a video taken from its closed circuit television system showing him about to commit suicide. The local authority claims to have done

nothing legally or morally wrong. As the law currently stands, he cannot complain of a breach of his right to privacy, because he has no such right.

PHILIP LEACH
*Legal Office, Liberty
London SE1*

Betjeman to miss Abbey evensong

Sir: The ceremony for the dedication of Sir John Betjeman's stone in Poets' Corner has been fixed for the evening of Monday, 11 November; and I learn indirectly that there will be no choral evensong in the abbey on that date – such as was thought a fitting prelude to the dedication of both Sir Trollope and the House of Commons. No doubt, the reason is that the choir is required for Armistice Day services during the day, and must not be overworked.

It is pathetically ironic that Betjeman who, alone among those commemorated in Poets' Corner, was in his life a staunchly vocal and militant champion of the Church of England for its own sake, should be treated in this cursory fashion. To dedicate his stone without the accompanying glory of a full Church of England choral evensong is like hurling a general without his full military honours.

Will the authorities now think again and defer the date of the ceremony to a date when the choir is in harness again, and the dedication can be carried out in the proper style?

LORD HORDER OF ASHFORD
*President, the Betjeman Society
London, NW8*

Happy birthday, nuclear prophet

Sir: The Obituaries/Gazette page for 12 October is alone worth the cover price of *The Independent*. Not only does the telling of three, very different, enriching lives add a little to our common humanity, but the editor of the *Church Times*, in one easy lesson, teaches the stronger sex how to resist all 26 seductive wiles of love-starved clergymen.

Moreover, the birthday column is good material for intercessory prayer. Baroness Thatcher, I learn, is 71. We are told to forgive not seven, but seventy times seven. An unexpected name follows hers: Mordecai Vanunu, nuclear technician, 42, now in the 10th year of solitary confinement in Ashkelon Prison for telling the world in *The Sunday Times* of the nuclear weapons to which Israel still will not officially admit. The land of Jeremiah and Micah should know better than to kidnap and persecute a prophet.

Mordecai Vanunu deserves our solidarity, needs our prayers and well deserves a place in your gazette. Thank you.

CANON PAUL OESTREICHER
Coventry Cathedral

Chile coup was backed by USA

Sir: Richard Gott's analogy between new Labour and Chile's Popular Unity ("Our interchangeable politicians", 5 October) is inaccurate.

The assumption that Popular Unity's "utopian incompetents" led to its downfall is ridiculous in the face of Pinochet's USA-backed military coup – a coup provoked by the very persistence and popularity of Allende's government.

The rise of the right in the Tory party seems certain with or without the help of Labour – and after 17 years of this centrifuge, a world-wary attitude to anyone who wants to oppose it is destructive.

Furthermore, what is the Labour Party to do in order to win the government experience Mr Gott suggests it lacks. Take a course?

EAUSTEN
London

Evasive Trust

Sir: In his reply to criticisms of the National Trust (Letters, 12 October) the chairman has neatly managed to avoid answering any of the points made so forcefully by your correspondents.

I cannot imagine that any explanation at the annual general meeting will provide answers. The National Trust is a stubbornly elitist body, many of whose staff are patrionising to visitors.

My small protest is to stay a member of the Scottish National Trust but visit mainly English properties; illogical perhaps, but it also recognises that in Scotland these problems do not exist.

MALCOLM TAYLOR
Lancaster

Silly old science

Sir: So "the fault lies with science, not the girls and their mothers", does it? (Leader, 9 October)? Just as the fault lay with the greylag goose killed, allegedly by Roy Hattersley's dog, in St James's Park – it was supposed to fly away. Do the logicians have a term for this inverted form of reasoning?

D G HOLLIDAY
Maidenhead, Berkshire

Post letters to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number (fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk)

E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

essay

Altruistic equations that killed a good man

We love – and hate – our neighbours because our genes make us do so. And there's algebra to prove it.

Andrew Brown tells the strange story of the men who unravelled the maths in our human make-up: knowledge that, for one of them, was too much to bear

The deathbed of an altruist can be a terrible place: 'A matress on the floor, one chair, a table, and several ammunition boxes made the only furniture. Of all the books and furnishings that I remembered from our first meeting in his fairly luxurious flat near Oxford Circus there remained some cheap clothes, a two-volume copy of Proust, and his typewriter. A cheap suitcase and some cardboard boxes contained most of his papers, others were scattered about on ammunition chests.'

These were the effects of George Price, an American science journalist. He had perfected an existing mathematical equation that shows how altruism can prosper among basically selfish animals – even humans. So shocked was he by his success in this, and the darker truths about human nature implied by the equation, that he embarked on a desperate career of service to the outcast, and finally killed himself with a pair of nail scissors in a London squat in January 1975.

The equations for altruism are not a figure of speech. They were first discovered by WD Hamilton, an Oxford biologist, who tells the story in his newly published collected papers. He is now Royal Society Research Professor of Zoology at Oxford, laden with scientific honours, but was then scrabbling around the fringes of the academic world with only a second-class degree from Cambridge, poor and so lonely that he sometimes

worked at night on a bench in Waterloo station rather than return to his bedsit.

Even now, when he is one of the most revered biologists in the world, there is an extraordinary shyness and simplicity about his manner. When I went to see him in his office, he had entirely forgotten our appointment, and yet talked for 40 minutes with the utmost courtesy.

The first, clumsy equations that he produced represent one of the great explanatory triumphs of Darwinism. They show how genes for self-sacrificing behaviour can spread through a population even though they harm some carriers of the genes in question. They demonstrate how animals can develop astonishingly selfless behaviour: how bees can evolve that sting fearlessly even though they must die in consequence.

The secret is to ensure that altruistic actions also benefit relatives of the altruist – who are themselves likely to share the gene in question. This helps to clarify why a mother may lay down her life for her children. But how much should she risk for a third cousin twice removed? The equations produce answers to such questions for every living thing on earth.

When Price first read Hamilton's equations he recognised that they raised a terrible problem. He saw that altruism in this biological and equation-bound sense is limited. It cannot supply the absolute and universal commandment of Christianity or the other global ethical systems.

The Hamilton/Price equations may tell us we must love our neighbours, but in ways that are about as far from the religious sense of the words as possible. They are descriptive, not prescriptive. There is no 'ought' about their command to love.

We love our neighbours because our genes built us that way, the equations say; and because the neighbours have probably been built the same way, too, and so will love us back.

This insight so shocked Price that he set out to check Hamilton's work himself and find the flaw he was convinced must be there. Instead, he ended up with a more elegant and general way to express them.

This new formulation made even clearer a worrying implication: that he had already grasped: that the same equations that demands the spread of altruistic behaviour may sometimes demand that a fondness for torturing, raping and murdering your neighbours is just as heritable and may be as easily spread as the urge to love them.

When Price discovered this, he was a militant atheist. Indeed, his atheism had played a role in his divorce from a Catholic in America and emigration to London. The discovery plunged him into a severe depression, from which he was delivered by an experience of God. 'He never described it to me in detail.'

says Hamilton, explaining the story in his recent book. 'He could tell that I was practically as he had been in his former life, and not open to anything that would seem intrinsically supernatural.'

'He described himself running through the streets of London in the neighbourhood of his flat in Marylebone. He was looking for a church, he said, and entered the first he came to and prayed for guidance. The immediate result was his complete dedication to Christianity.'

As an atheist and materialist, Price had been insufferable: for instance,

he had proposed controls of almost impossible stringency on any experiment designed to prove ESP to eliminate the remotest possibility of fraud. As a Christian, he was just the same. He soon quarrelled with the priest who received him, whom he found insufficiently zealous. He was not a fundamentalist in any normal sense: he completely accepted Darwinian evolution, and continued to work on his equations. He did not believe in the literal truth of biblical narratives. But he seems to have heard the sayings of Jesus as directly and unarguably as a bee feels the imperative to defend its nest.

'Sell all you have and give to the poor.' The derelicts he

entertained stole from him and caused chaos. He was forced to leave his apartments, and ended up dossing on the floor of the lab at University College, London, where he worked. Not even that lasted. An alcoholic whose wife he had tried to help started to harass him at the lab, and finally took to shouting at him from the street below. So he had to leave there, too, and descended by degrees to the squat in Finsbury Square, Euston, where he killed himself. His funeral was attended only by three or four tramps, and two of the most honoured and influential biologists in Britain, John Maynard Smith and WD Hamilton.

The story emerges from the prefaces to Hamilton's collected papers, which have just been republished (*Narrow Roads of Gen Land* by WD Hamilton, published by WH Freeman/Spektrum). The papers themselves are dense, real science. The innumerable reader must force himself past thickets of equations in search of the enchanted castle of truth – only to find that the equations were the truth. The prefaces to each paper, however, which describe how and why they came to be written, are a delight for anyone who is interested in the world, or even in English prose.

What is about biologists that makes them write so well?

Richard Dawkins is the obvious example, but not the only one:

Stephen Jay Gould, and EO

Wilson, who coined the term sociobiology, would serve almost as well: Hamilton has spent his working life in the study of two great literary motifs, sex and altruism, and as his description of George Price's deathbed, quoted at the beginning of this essay, shows, he has most of the gifts a novelist needs.

Perhaps this vividness arises because biologists believe they have a clear and important message about human beings and our place in the world. The Hamilton/Price equations show how many of the traits that we think of as peculiarly human can arise and spread among animals. They suggest there must be biological limits to the general level of altruism in any human population, no matter how much or how little love may be shown among the extremes. They seem to annihilate the special status of human beings in the world. They seem also to render religious accounts of human nature unnecessary.

Dawkins's brutally unsympathetic view of religion is well known. Wilson, founder of sociobiology, is just as hostile to the truth-claims of religion, though far more sympathetic to their emotional attractions. Hamilton himself, in conversation, says that Price, before his conversion, was 'much more of an atheist than I am'.

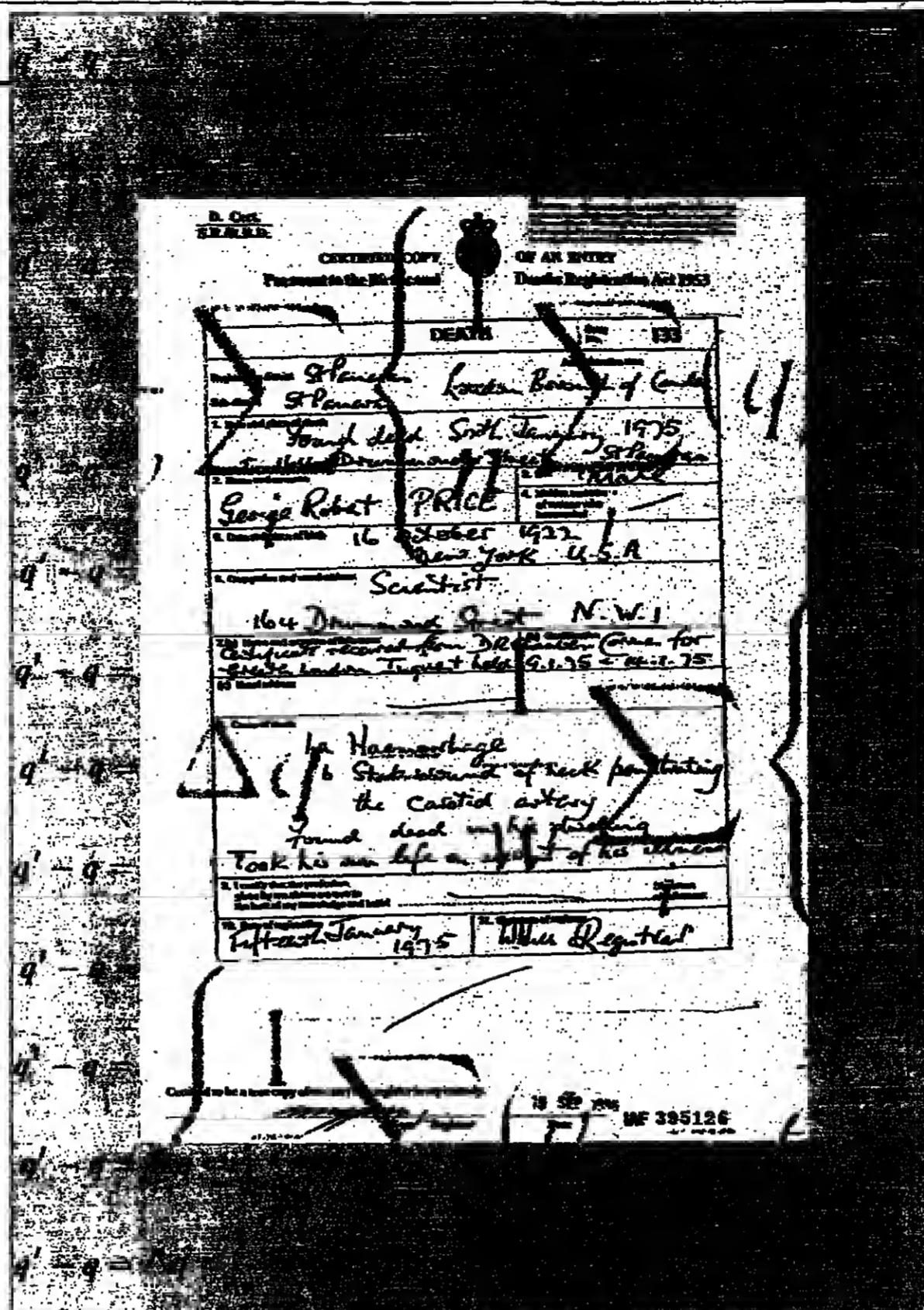
The equations for altruism are only a part of the sociobiologist's armoury. By treating behaviour patterns as inher-

ited, and as much subject to Darwinian evolution and susceptible to mathematical analysis as are the body shapes of animals, they have discovered a set of tools that can appear fearfully powerful. Hamilton's equations appear to predict, for example, that if our immediately ancestral chimp species did make its crucial transition towards humanity on a sea shore, then we are likely to be more co-operative and altruistic by nature than if this happened in a jungle or savannah. This is because with movement limited to one long strip of coastline, neighbouring groups are more likely to share genes than if there is a whole savannah through which to disperse.

But an account of how human morality might have evolved does not solve moral questions. Knowing that a conscience is part of our nature does not tell us how we should keep on good terms with one. Evolutionary theory is a science of averages and mathematical abstractions, whereas we live our lives uniquely and irrepeatably. The altruistic or selfless acts that interest us as ethical beings are those that people choose freely, not those we cannot avoid: the man who dies in the cellars of the secret police rather than implicate his friends in a conspiracy is a heroic figure, whereas the baby who dies in one of Ceausescu's orphanages from emotional neglect is merely tragic.

The same complexities arise if we consider selfishness instead of altruism. *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins's first book, was partly a popularisation of Hamilton's work and its implications. And genes for altruism are 'selfish' to exactly the extent that all other genes are. They compete to pass themselves on into subsequent generations, and if we have them, we know that they have competed successfully. But this 'selfishness' is an abstract quality. It is nothing like the selfishness we talk about when discussing people's character. The links between genes and human behaviour are found at a much darker and more atavistic level: one of the most chilling moments in Hamilton's book comes when he reflects on his own dark, violent passions so alien to his civilised self, and concludes that they must represent a substrate of primitive nature: one of the things that let his ancestors survive.

George Price's life and death does not simply illustrate the extraordinary complexity of the relationship between religion and science. It also shows the vast gulf fixed between what a biologist might mean by self-hood and what an novelist might. The last act of Price's life was, in one sense supremely selfish, a suicide often. But even that had its considerate aspect, as Hamilton tells it: 'As I tidied up what was worth taking into his suitcase, his dried blood cracked on the linoleum under my shoes: a basically tidy man, he had chosen to die on the open floor, not on his bed.'



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I held the forceps at the birth of a notion



Miles Kington

I was too busy to attend the 10th birthday celebrations of this newspaper last week, as I was frantically trying to get cracking on my history of 'The Independent'. It had occurred to me I was probably the only person on the paper who had never written a book about his experiences here and what better time to rush it out than now? So all last week I was sequestered in a small office, working on my history of 'The Independent', trying to ignore the drunken laughing and throwing of celebratory sandwiches next door, and here is the first instalment today.

I can't remember who first

had the idea for *The Independent* newspaper – me or Matthew Symonds or Stephen Glover or Andreas Whittemore Smith. This was in the Eighties, when we all saw a lot of each other in the canteen of *The Daily Telegraph*, where we worked at the time. That is to say, they worked on *The Daily Telegraph* and I worked in the canteen. I was between columns and was doing a waiting and washing-up job, but as I was always pretty well dressed I tended to mingle with the customers, and very few of them realised I was not a fellow journalist. As indeed I was.

'A new newspaper!' we all chorused. 'Great idea! We could get Eddie Shah in as consultant!' This was an ironic reference to the now forgotten Eddie Shah, who had just launched – and seen sink – a new newspaper called *Today or Yesterday* or something. Sorry, I've had to write this story so fast that I haven't had time to check details. Still, that means it's real journalism, I suppose!

'No, I've costed it out very accurately,' said Whittemore Smith. 'I like a man who knows his own strengths. Glover?' 'I'd like to be on the paper for a while taking notes, then leave and write a history of it,' said Glover, making a

note of what he had just said.

'Good,' said Whittemore Smith. 'And you ... ?'

He obviously couldn't remember my name, which was not surprising, as he had never known it. Each of them, it turned out later, thought that I was a friend brought along by one of the others.

'Well,' I said, 'I thought I'd do all the investigating and writing and reporting and that sort of thing ...'

'Good!' they said.

It was obvious that none of them had given any thought to that. 'And when that's up and running,' I said, 'I'd like to run the Sunday paper.'

'What Sunday paper?' said Whittemore Smith. 'There isn't going to be a Sunday paper.'

'Oh, come on!' I said.

'Everyone wants a Sunday paper sooner or later.'

'Everyone who starts a daily sooner or later has Sunday ideas! And in the long run they end up having a magazine; a publishing house and a TV channel and ...'

'What will you call the Sunday paper?' said Whittemore Smith, responding to my vision.

'That depends what you're going to call the daily paper.'

'The Independent,' said Whittemore Smith.

'In that case,' I said, 'I'll call the Sunday paper the ... the ... the Sunday Guardian!'

This was clearly not the answer they expected.

'Wouldn't *Independent on Sunday* be more logical?' said Whittemore Smith.

'More logical, yes. Oh yes, it'd be more logical all right,' I said, trying to emulate William Brown's sardonic sarcasm. 'But newspapers are not a logical world. In the press we move in a world of whims and inspiration, and intuitive genius ...'

'If we call it the *Sunday Guardian*, people will think it's a Sunday edition of *The Guardian*,' said Glover, a shade nastily.

'And they will buy it for very reason!' I said. 'That is the whole idea!'

'I was called away to serve at another table at that restaurant, and by the time I got back, the decision had been taken in my absence to call the Sunday paper *The Independent on Sunday*. It was not the first time that decisions were taken behind my back that were to be bitterly regretted later.'

More of this history of 'The Independent' as and when it is cleared by the libel lawyers.

The superhighway is here: shame about the jams



**Andreas
Whitton
Smith**

Like early cinema-goers, Internet users are tolerant of the new medium's technical limitations

We have entered the Internet Age. Historians will date it as starting in 1995 and running on perhaps 10 years or so. The period will have the same relationship to the development of computers as, say, the Railway Age of the 1930s had to the invention of the steam engine.

A new technology is again transforming the way we live. In the United States, President Clinton, on the campaign trail last Thursday, announced plans to provide free Internet access to every school. In the UK, it is estimated that 3.6 million Britons have surfed the Web at least once in the past six months and it looks as though that figure will rise to 5 million by Christmas, equivalent to one in 10 of the population.

Events are moving quickly because every company which could play a role in the development is now doing so, and those involved are confident about the destination: the delivery of fully interactive multimedia onto a screen in your home. In other words, it is a new medium which combines all the attributes of its predecessors – text, sound, moving image – and adds a new ingredient, interactivity. It is the last quality which gives the Internet its participative nature. One-to-one communication is its defining characteristic.

It is significant how forgiving consumers are. The Internet at present is like a strange new city, where few things work well and where the roads are in a state of constant traffic jam. The chance of accessing a chosen Web site quickly depends upon what time of day it is. Once North American users get going each day, the speed of the Internet declines markedly.

And yet enthusiasm for the new medium grows apace. Early cinema-goers were equally understanding, as were radio's first listeners. Jerky films without colour or sound, air waves filled with hiss and crackle – the first users were not put off. Nor were train passengers at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, nor were Edwardian motorists. They could all sense what was well done within the existing technical limits; they were sharing an adventure and they confidently expected improvements – both in the technology itself and what you can do with it.

To make the Internet more convenient, there are two lines of advance: to provide hardware which is at once easier to use, cheaper and more efficient, and to improve the mechanisms for making payments for goods and services. As far as the former is concerned, one idea is to give television sets some of the capabilities of a personal computer so that the Internet could be accessed via the TV screen – what is called a WebTV. Among the problems to be overcome are the difficulties of reading text on a TV screen and the question of distance – one watches a TV programme

Computers Limited to provide an Internet service with news, weather and travel information as well as educational material and entertainment. News International has announced a similar deal with British Telecom. Underlining the participative nature of the medium, BT said that the news service would be able to offer teenagers' help with their homework.

Next to move are retailers of books and music. The book seller with the largest number of titles available in the world is an American Internet operation, Amazon. Its catalogue contains two thirds of the 1.5 million English books in print, making it many times bigger than any existing book seller. Before long, Amazon customers will be able to ask authors questions via e-mail and then, perhaps, chat "on-line" with each other about the books they are reading.

What, then, are the features of the Internet Age? National boundaries begin to dissolve. Amazon is based in Seattle; I have never been there but the company is likely to cater for my tastes at least as well as my local book seller. Moreover, the Internet Age favours the individual because it enables and encourages participation. The Internet is not an instrument of mass-marketing. Indeed, it is likely to operate against the growing homogenisation of taste which has been such a feature of life since the Twenties.

seated some metres from the box but one works at a computer screen only centimetres away.

Another approach is to manufacture and market cheap, cut-down versions of personal computers, known as network computers, which provide Internet access and little else. They cost a few hundred pounds rather than upwards of \$1,000, but may be seen as too utilitarian. At the same time a great deal of work is being undertaken to increase the speed of the Internet, particularly over the last mile of telephone cable which joins each household to the main trunking system. But it has to be asked whether the Internet will be like London traffic: will improvements stimulate increases in the volume of traffic rather than bring about quicker journeys?

Payments are made by credit card, but it has been difficult to persuade consumers that transmitting credit card details via the Internet is as safe as other methods. Hence the development of encryption techniques. In any case there has remained the problem of handling transactions where the value is £10 or less. This is the role for a new system, CyberCoin. Users are provided with a piece of software, a sort of electronic wallet, which they fill from their credit cards and then use to make small payments.

The first business activity to migrate to the Internet has been the provision of information. The BBC has announced a link with International Com-

puter Limited to provide an Internet service with news, weather and travel information as well as educational material and entertainment. News International has announced a similar deal with British Telecom. Underlining the participative nature of the medium, BT said that the news service would be able to offer teenagers' help with their homework.

Since non-believers have never had a right to reply on "Thought", the Rev Sheogog's protest is a bit rich. His Christian soldiers have their say most of the time. The C of E ensures that a cabal of like-minded ecumenical moderates in other faiths, safe and anodyne, conspire to keep everyone else out. Determined to offend no one, they exclude the authentic tones of most religions which are by nature divisive and offensive.

So they exclude the Rev Ian Paisley: why don't we hear him proclaiming anathemas on the anti-Christ in Rome? Why don't we hear a papist fulminating on the subject of contraception and abortion? Why not Anne Widdecombe on her curious explanation of the Christian nature of capitalism? Where are the mad mullahs, pagans, astrologers, Mormons and any others whose more extreme beliefs might expose the notion of religion to healthy ridicule?

Anne Atkins' rant was rather refreshing. A good blast

of full-blown homophobia tells us a great deal about the C of E which is divided between the closet (or vestry) gays and the homophobes. Why don't we get the full flavour of some wild Imam proclaiming war on the infidels? Out there in the real world, religion is ferocious, extreme and savage. Ask the people of Northern Ireland or Jerusalem. Ask the women of Kahau.

No, instead we get a warm soup of inchoate "Thoughts", that jar oddly with the brisk tones of the Today programme. You know something is wrong

from the moment they start to speak. Sometimes they are perky and facetious, sometimes they coze with improper social concern for the Bosnians or the homeless. Even when it is a Sikh, you do not get the authentic tones of the rebels besieged in the Golden Temple, the fanatics who shot Indira Gandhi. You get a soft-voiced gentle soul who may carry a dirk in his turban, but sounds as if he, too, has been through a C of E theological college. This is a conspiracy of the religions to present themselves as agreeable, reasonable people,

despite the mayhem religion causes wherever in the world people actually believe in it.

More than half the population says vaguely that they believe in "something" larger than them, though only 35 per cent say they definitely believe in a God – about the same number who proclaim themselves complete non-believers. Only 7 per cent of the population is non-Christian and only half of them actually practice their religions.

This is a pretty flimsy basis on which to inflict religious broadcasting in prime-time slots, because there is nothing in the

BBC charter that compels it. Lewis Wolpert, scientist, thinker and atheist, said last week that the religious impulse has been programmed into human beings by natural selection. When humans became conscious they confronted the dreadful knowledge of their own inevitable death. These thoughts were so frightening that in order to protect themselves, some developed religious belief in an after-life. That made it easier for them to live with their new-found consciousness and therefore more able to survive, making irrational belief a part of our nature. It does not, however, make any of it true.

The BBC Religious Broadcasting Department is a curious animal headed as it is by a priest and staffed by religious folk. "But surely you wouldn't have a science department run by non-scientists?" is the odd explanation. Then should we put politicians in charge of politics, doctors in charge of health coverage?

When I called the religious department to discuss the latest row over "Thought", there was a distinctly unhappy expletive, followed by a rather more Christian sigh of resignation. My heart goes out to them, because I know what it is like in the BBC to be on the receiving end of public trouble. However good their case, BBC staff can only reply to outside critics with a sock in their mouth and both hands tied behind their back.

The BBC is the nation's punch bag because it is all we have to symbolise and codify our increasingly fissiparous, pluralistic society. The BBC's guidelines have become a kind of national bible in which we express our identity, our standards of fairness and morality, taste and decency.

But for this reason, the status of religion within the BBC is worth challenging. "Thought for the Day" may only be a short slot on the top radio show of the day, but it symbolises a respect for religion which does not reflect the national state of mind. Worse, it peddles a phoney religiosity which pretences religion.

Religion only speaks in softly moderate tones in a country that no longer believes in it. True believers in Jerusalem and elsewhere kill each other. So if "Thought" must continue, and if it refuses to admit rationalist thinkers, at least let us hear some of the trumpeting of unbridled true religion – including the Anne Atkinses.

Give us hellfire, not opiate, in the God slot

by Polly Toynbee



Out there in the real world, religion is ferocious, extreme and savage. Ask the people in Northern Ireland and Jerusalem

A prize shames the world into action

The Nobel award should end international complacency at the plight of East Timor, says Ian Linden

By awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Bishop Belo and José Ramos Horta, two key campaigners for justice in East Timor, the Nobel Committee has sent a strong signal that it is time to end the long betrayal of East Timor. But, as Indonesia's outraged response illustrates, it is not going to change hearts and minds in the Suharto regime.

In contrast to the destruction visited on Iraq after it annexed Kuwait, Indonesia invaded East Timor in December 1975 with impunity. Since then, and in the face of 10 UN resolutions calling for withdrawal and upholding East Timorese rights to self-determination, the Indonesian military has presided over the death by extra-judicial execution, war, famine and disease of some 200,000 East Timorese people.

Until now Indonesia has assumed that time is on its side, and that guerrillas fighting for independence could be wiped out. Encouraging some 100,000 Javanese settlers into East Timor's tiny population of about 850,000 has consolidated Indonesia's position. The Vatican appointed Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo as apostolic administrator of Dili, the East Timorese capital, in May 1993 in the hope that he would not rock the boat. It was a miscalculation.

With growing skill the youthful Belo walked the tightrope of the East Timorese resistance's guerrilla war and Indonesian occupation. He inherited a church that provided both solace and a cultural space for the East Timorese. There was no doubt where his heart lay: in 1989 Belo wrote to the UN secre-

tary-general calling for a UN-supervised referendum on self-determination. He warned that East Timor was "dying as a people and as a nation". There was no reply.

It took the massacre of some 200 East Timorese civilians by Indonesian forces at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili in 1991 to help turn the tide of world opinion. The British journalist Max Stahl caught the slaughter on video and the film was broadcast worldwide to international outcry.

In 1994 the John Pilger/David Munro documentary *Death of a Nation* was shown on Central TV. A response line was jammed with callers until 3am the next morning. Timor had ceased to be a small unknown island in the Indonesian archipelago. It was a popular cause.

Against this background, the UN established talks between the old colonial power, Portugal, and Indonesia. After several rounds without much progress, the parties agreed to all-inclusive talks. The first meeting took place in June 1995. Despite manipulation by the Indonesian government, the wide range of Timorese represented reached a consensus statement, in large part due to bridge-building by Bishop Belo.

International pressure and reaction to repression within Indonesia are now beginning to make inroads. Indonesia's foreign minister, Ali Alatas, has called the Timor issue "grave in Indonesia's shoe" hobbling his country's ambitions on the world stage.

The Nobel Prize adds three things to the picture. First, it enhances Bishop Belo's credentials as a mediator, a role that the UN wants him to play. Belo's mediation in the

East Timorese dialogue has already complemented UN involvement.

Second, it will strengthen the hand of Ramos Horta, the exiled leader of the East Timorese resistance, and perhaps revive the movement's peace proposal. This calls, within a two-year period, for a ceasefire, release of political prisoners and the reduction in number of Indonesian troops to 1,000. A referendum with independence as one option would be held after five years.

These developments do not sit easily with the public position of the Foreign Office. Indonesia is an Asian tiger economy in the making, seen as a potentially vast market of 194 million people and a strategic linchpin in South-East Asia. It is a profligate purchaser of arms and concluded \$201m of arms sales with Britain between 1988 and 1992. In June 1993 British Aerospace was awarded a £500m contract for 24 Hawk fighter/trainers.

Those visiting the Foreign Office to advocate an arms embargo know the refrain by heart: concern about human rights ... impracticable to monitor regularly ... no evidence that Hawk aircraft are used for repression ... Indonesian government assurances ... need to consult our EU partners. But without the stick of an arms embargo and the carrot of enhanced international status for Indonesia, the future for East Timor looks grim.

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The author is director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BI, which this week publishes 'East Timor: The Continuing Betrayal.'

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The benefits of following what directors buy, not what they say

Actions, they say, speak far louder than words. Smooth-talking executives employing the latest in fashionable management speak may win round even the most hard-nosed investors to their cause.

But when directors actually dip into their own pockets to buy stock in their company or sell to raise some cash – even if only to pay for the kids' public school fees – their actions can be a window on the soul of a business and shareholders should sit up and take notice.

Historically, dealings by company directors in their own shares have provided good signals for the market sectors and individual stocks.

According to research just published by Philip Wolstenholme, UK market strategist at US investment bank Merrill Lynch, buying by insiders has been particularly successful, usually on a one-year view.

And when director selling is combined with a downward

trend in earnings forecasts, sectors and stocks tend to underperform the rest of the stock market.

Surveying the latest trends in directors' dealings, Mr Wolstenholme concludes that shares remain bullish about the UK stock market, despite the recent rise in share prices.

He notes that in September, 224 directors bought shares and 101 sold, leaving the buy/sell ratio fairly high at 2.2. His analysis, which excludes all options-related transactions, bonuses and trades under £1,000, also finds that directors are unusually positive about smaller companies.

He suspects that directors of smaller companies, aware of the cyclical nature of their businesses, are seeing an improving trend and are buying accordingly. One of the most heavily bought sectors in the past three months has been engineering, though insiders are also warming to general industrial stocks.

According to research just

published by First Choice, one operator of First Choice, came out top when ranked by the number of directors who have been net buyers over the past six months, closely followed by Dairy Crest, the processing arm of the old milk marketing board, and ML Holdings, the aerospace and defence group. The biggest net sellers over the same period were found at high-flying restaurant chain PizzaExpress.

This morning, President Parfitt, the recently-revamped distribution group, kicks off a

fairly quiet week for company reporting. The figures are unlikely to be accompanied by further news on the progress of

SHARE SPOTLIGHT

recent merger. The figures, which will contain just three months' contribution from Premier, are likely to reflect the impact of weaker semiconductor prices and a catalogue business being restrained by slower-than-expected growth in the UK economy. Analysts are looking for pre-tax profits in the six months to July of around £60m versus £56m last time, with the dividend raised from 4.6p to 5.3p.

Selling its US fresh produce distribution business last week for £73.5m has rather stolen the thunder from Albert Fisher's sell-off. The deal was long time coming, having been flagged in April. NatWest

thinks that relief the deal has finally been done should more than compensate for the terms being slightly less favourable than originally thought. Although the shares have underperformed the market by 15 per cent since April, NatWest feels Fisher's 11.9 per cent yield should preclude further weakness. In the year to August 1996, the broker looks for pre-tax profits before exceptional items of £40.5m, but the forecast for 1997 has been trimmed by £3m to £43m to reflect the earnings dilution that comes with the US deal and weaker European currencies.

Worshippers of the grain will be looking out for preliminary figures from Highland Distilleries on Monday and from Burn Stewart two days later.

Most attention will focus on Highland's progress on integrating whisky distiller Macallan-Glenlivet, bought earlier this year for £188m, and news on the pricing strategy for

Highland's Famous Grouse blend in the run-up to the key Christmas selling period. Analysts expect pre-tax profits of £41m versus £43m last time.

Burn Stewart warned earlier this month that an unresolved accounting issue had caused it to delay publication of its year-end results by two weeks. It said the issue had come up late in auditing, but declined to give further detail. The lack of a trading statement gave some comfort to analysts, but they are concerned that with whisky prices weakening in recent years, Burn Stewart may have to write down the value of the stocks. With forecast earnings per share of 5.6p there is also a question mark over the 5p dividend being maintained.

On Wednesday, Smiths Industries is expected to report pre-exceptional profits of up to £165m in the year to July versus £136m last time. Analysts expect the result to benefit

from the inclusion of recent acquisitions in the industrial and a good performance from the aerospace side. They will also be looking for comments on the state of the US healthcare market, where there is speculation about how robust margins are in its medical division.

Eight new store openings, including a first presence in the Greater London area, are likely to have done wonders for sales at retailer DFS Furniture, though possibly at the expense of margins as store opening and advertising costs rise. NatWest forecasts pre-tax profits of £30m versus £26.2m for the year to July.

Ties tend to bought in the run-up to Christmas so Tuesday's first-half figures from Tie Rack will not be much of a guide to the full-year outcome. Indeed, interims typically account for only 5-6 per cent of annual profits. Pre-tax profits should come in around £500,000, in line with a year ago.

STOCK MARKET WEEK

PATRICK TOOHER

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Crackdown on schemes to avoid bonus tax

ROGER TRAPP

City advisers are braced for a crackdown on schemes designed to reduce the tax paid on bonuses to bankers and other professionals, who are eyeing their highest earnings since the late 1980s.

The authorities are already understood to be challenging one popular technique used by investment banks to avoid National Insurance contributions, by paying bonuses in the form of life policies that are subsequently cashed in. Tax specialists at leading accountancy firms believe that the Department of Social Security, which is responsible for NI contributions, is collecting material to mount a court action against other tax reduction plans.

Sandy Pepper, partner with Coopers & Lybrand, said: "It's

fair to say that the DSS does not like these arrangements at all. And the Chancellor is on record as saying he doesn't like them."

Since the late 1980s, when the cap on NI contributions was lifted, employers have sought to avoid liability to a tax that amounts to a tenth of payroll costs by paying staff in such "currencies" as unit trusts, gold, diamonds, platinum sponge and fine wines.

Instead of introducing a general anti-avoidance provision, with exceptions where appropriate, the Government has merely blocked each loophole as it arises. Recently, employers and their advisers have sought more obscure methods in the effort to keep one step ahead of the authorities.

Though it would be relatively easy to do, there has been little effort so far to produce

legislation cracking down on the NI avoidance schemes.

If the Government did decide to act it would be another blow to City institutions following the

Chancellor's decision last week to close a loophole that gave significant tax advantages when companies carried out share buybacks and special dividends.

The belief there is widespread abuse of the system in the City has been fuelled by the discovery that Peter Young, the disgraced Morgan Grenfell

Asset Management fund manager, had his bonus paid into a custodial account in Jersey.

Opinion in the financial services community is divided over

the extent to which other organisations follow this practice, especially since having money paid into an offshore account carries no immediate tax advantages, on the grounds that it is where the recipient was based when earning it rather than where the money is paid that interests the Revenue.

Specialists stressed there were a lot of myths about Jersey and other offshore centres and claimed that much of the talk was hype aimed at drumming up business.

John Whiting, tax partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers, said:

"Nowadays, it is more and more difficult to find a loophole and whenever they are found they are based in Britain, they are able to claim that a proportion of their income relates

to work done in other countries and is therefore not subject to UK tax."

also sends officials to seminars devoted to saving tax.

David Williams, tax partner with Smith & Williamson, said: "There are some fairly sharp and aggressive tax inspectors who look after the affairs of people in the City and they don't accept any old nonsense."

Mr Pepper suggested much of the work done by him and his counterparts was connected with ever more sophisticated remuneration arrangements.

For example, if employers are seeking to build in an element of deferred pay to act as a hand-cuff, much effort goes into ensuring that the employee does not pay tax before he or she receives the money.

A DSS spokesman said the department kept the situation under review and acted against particular schemes when it felt it was appropriate.

Staff paid with life policies or offshore with shares

Some of the most popular tax avoidance schemes of recent years are:

- Bonuses paid in the form of life policies. They have been used by a small number of large investment banks over the past two to three years.
- Bonuses paid offshore in the form of shares. Some organisations grant executives options that are not liable to tax when they are exercised, though there may be capital gains tax to pay if the shares are sold. It is possible legitimately to avoid paying UK tax if the options are put into a trust based offshore.
- Pre-retirement employee benefit

schemes (Prebs) paid into a discretionary trust set up by the company. Though officially no individual has any right to the money, in practice there is an agreement between the company and its executives that a ring of the money is theirs. The absence of a right over the money means that the executive does not pay tax until the fund is distributed, and it, in the words of one tax specialist, "they are retired and living on the Costa del Sol, they might not pay tax at all".

- One variant of the Preb is the loan from a trust. Money can be lent from the trust to employees or their spouses.
- Another variant is the loan against the offshore trust. Provided the employee can demonstrate that there are funds in the trust, and that there will be some form of distribution, a bank may grant a loan, and so allow an employee to gain income through having funds deposited offshore but not immediately liable for tax.
- Some US banks in London employ US personnel with separate contracts for work that they do outside the UK. Though they are based in Britain, they are able to claim that a proportion of their income relates to work done in other countries and is therefore not subject to UK tax.

Wickes director to repay part of bonus

PETER RODGERS
Financial Editor

Trefor Llewellyn, former finance director of Wickes, the troubled DIY retailer, is believed to have agreed to repay part of his 1995 bonus and Henry Sweetbaum, the former chairman is considering the same move, it emerged yesterday.

Repayment of the profit-related bonuses would be regarded in the City as an acknowledgement that they share some of the responsibility for the £50m overstatement of profits that put the group into a crisis.

Wickes booked discounts from suppliers as profits-before the goods were sold, over a period of four years or more, so the bonuses were based on profit levels that proved to be an illusion.

Mr Sweetbaum, who is not thought to have agreed yet on a repayment but is still in talks, was paid £890,000 in profit-related bonuses last year.

Mr Llewellyn, who now finance director of Caradon, was paid £609,000 and another director, Michael Corrier, who is likely to leave Wickes soon, was paid the same.

It is believed Mr Corrier is also considering a repayment but it is not clear whether he will follow Mr Llewellyn's example.

This week the company is expected to publish a long-awaited circular detailing its account of what happened during the years in which profits were overstated.

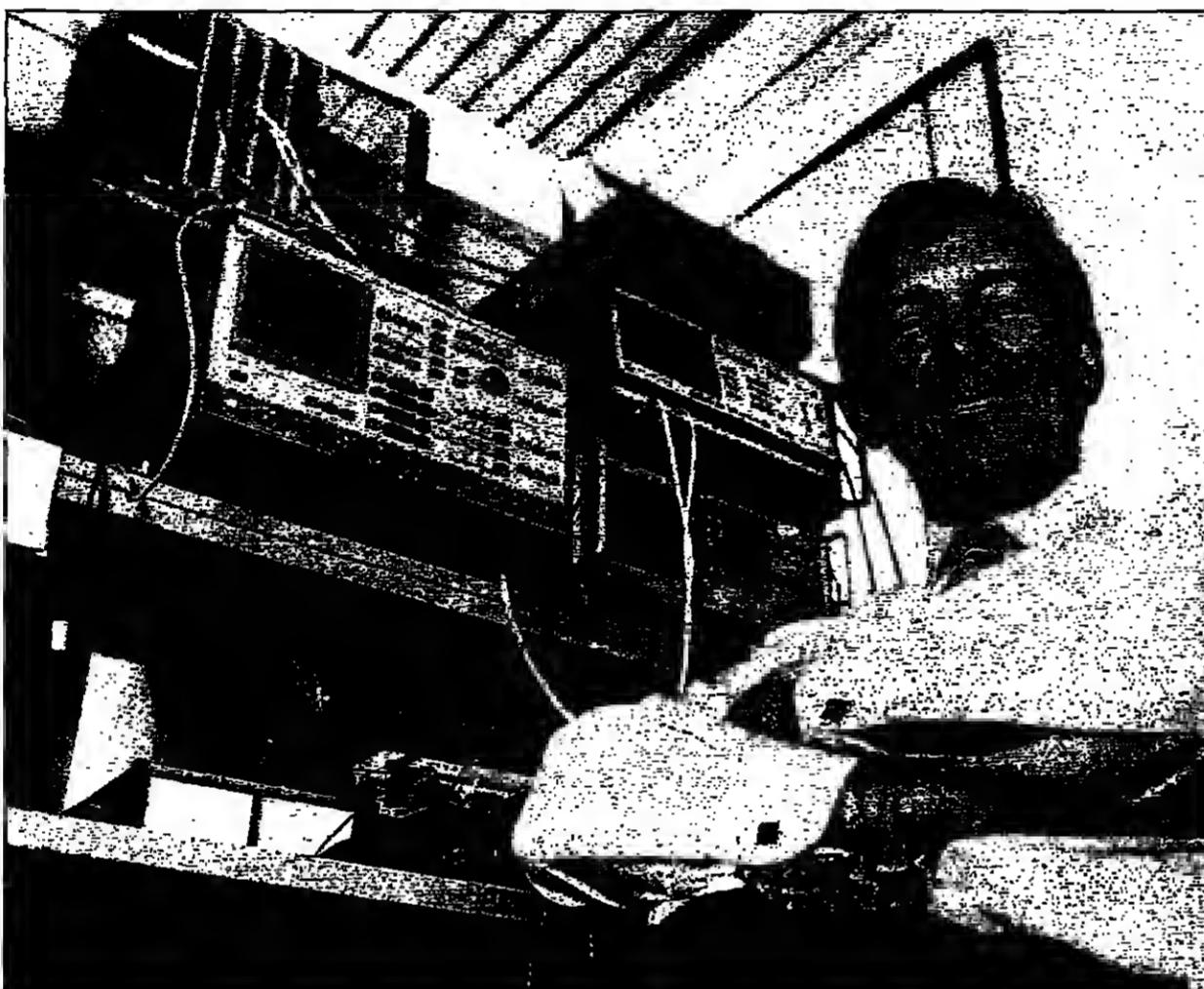
One issue in the negotiations over a possible repayment of bonuses is whether any of the non-executive directors of Wickes will be made to take some public share of responsibility for what went wrong.

The intention of the circular is to say who was responsible for the profits overstatement and how it happened, but there have been delays in getting the document to the point of signature by the board because of legal arguments over the wording.

It is thought that the circular will say the executive directors bore overall responsibility for what went wrong, not that they were directly implicated.

The target date for publication is believed to be Wednesday but Wickes has missed deadlines before.

The shares were suspended when the overstatement of profits came to light and are unlikely to be relisted until late this year or early next year, when the company will also need to announce a rights issue to replace some of the huge hole discovered in its balance sheet.



Five businessmen are likely to make a paper profit of more than £1.5m when their company, SDX Business Systems, floats on the stock market with a full listing later this year, in a placing organised by Kleinwort Benson. SDX is also paying £1.5m – averaging about £8,000 a head – to

200 of its staff as a flotation bonus. The company, which specialises in business communications technology, is expected to be valued at more than £50m, including up to £10m of new money. SDX was bought from STC five years ago in a management buyout for a price believed to be

£5m, and it is now worth eight times as much.

The biggest shareholder, with 22 per cent, is Frank Bretherton (above), chief executive, whose stake is worth more than £8m. Two other directors, Jeremy Cooke and Bob Kennedy, own about 10 per cent each.

Utility job cuts 'cost taxpayers £805m'

JOHN WILLCOCK

The Labour Party said yesterday in a study justifying its proposed windfall profits tax that privatised utilities had cut 89,473 jobs since the last election at a cost to the taxpayer of £805m.

David Blunkett, MP, shadow education and employment secretary, said that figures compiled with the help of the House of Commons Library and the AEEU, the engineering workers' union, showed that there had been a substantial payback to shareholders and a growing

payout by taxpayers, who were picking up the cost of job losses.

Mr Blunkett said that the total cost to taxpayers since 1992, in both unemployment benefits and lost revenue, amounted to £805m, against profits made by the utilities of more than £3bn.

Mr Blunkett added: "It is clear from these figures that, despite their protests, on past profits alone the privatised industries are in a position to contribute towards Labour's plan to boost the skills of Britain's young people."

"The windfall tax on the pri-

vatised utilities, proposed by Gordon Brown and I, will be used to fund schemes for young people in the public, private and voluntary sectors."

He made concessions to business opinion, however, saying: "Labour has no argument with increased efficiency leading to improved customer service."

"However, some of the privatised utilities have lined the pockets of fat cats at the expense of the taxpayer, the consumer and their employees. The nation as a whole has been expected to pick up the bill for the excesses of the fat cats."

Mr Blunkett pointed to British Gas, which has axed more than 33,000 jobs, while directors' pay has risen dramatically and profits have increased by more than £2bn.

On top of that, more than 20,000 jobs have gone in the English electricity companies since the last election, while those companies have made combined profits of more than £1.2bn. British Telecom has shed 40,000 jobs since 1992, while making profits of £1.0bn. In the water industry, total employment has risen but the number of employees deal-

ing directly with water has fallen by 21.5 per cent (10,290 jobs) since 1992.

Mr Blunkett said: "Taxpayers have lost twice in the sale of the former public utilities and in the cost that all of us have had to pick up."

"By their actions we have not only lost the payback to the Exchequer from former public services – the Post Office paid £67m to the Chancellor – we have also had to pay for the benefits and lost tax revenues resulting from the redundancies in the industries concerned."

VNU forces Hollick to make decision on Blenheim

PETER RODGERS
Financial Editor

Lord Hollick, chief executive of United News and Media, is expected to decide this morning whether to intervene in the struggle for Blenheim Exhibitions.

United has been watching developments ahead of an expected move tomorrow by the Dutch publishing group VNU

to lift its stake from the 14.9 per cent it acquired last week.

No decision had been made by last night to launch a bid, at least £490m, but neither had it been firmly ruled out. United is likely to be cautious because a bid war could prove expensive. In the City it was regarded as not a foregone conclusion that Lord Hollick would press

ahead, now that a rival already has a substantial stake.

VNU will be free under the takeover code to lift its stake again after a seven-day moratorium, and it is thought to be aiming for 29.9 per cent, which is the maximum allowed without making a full bid. This would effectively block any other bidder, and it is this that has forced Lord Hollick's hand.

Meanwhile, Reed-Elsevier

has withdrawn from the fray after expressing interest in Blenheim. It is thought to have

been deterred by the likely price, which would start at the 50p a share that VNU paid.

Reed has not ruled out buying parts of Blenheim from VNU, should it acquire the company.

The Blenheim board controls 40 per cent of the company and has been resisting any offer price below 500p a share. Blenheim shares closed at 484p on Friday, up 174p since June.

It is thought that the bid will be made at 500p a share, which is the minimum price at which the company can be taken over.

• Midland Bank is giving 18 months' free banking from today as part of new package for small business start-ups, as competition in the sector intensifies. NatWest Bank already offers the same period of free banking but requires borrowers to go on a training course, whereas the Midland package has no strings attached. Barclays and Lloyds both offer 12 months' free banking to start-ups. Midland is also cutting its small business protected overdraft interest rate by 0.5 per cent.

• The Fayed brothers took more than £80m out of the Harrods department stores last year, made up from £40m of dividends and the repayment of a subordinated loan of £40.9m, according to the company's annual report. The previous year the brothers were paid a dividend of £50m.

• British fund managers expect UK inflation and interest rates to rise next year, according to a survey by Merrill Lynch. All but one of respondents expect inflation to rise next year, while 89 per cent expect base rates to be higher in a year's time. Merrill Lynch's sentiment appears to be swinging towards the engineering sector and away from retailers.

• The Personal Investment Authority (PIA) is to launch another investigation into pensions disclosure. Collette Bow, chief executive of PIA, speaking on *Panorama* tonight on BBC1, says that while pensions language is becoming "less unclear", there is still some way to go. She says: "I still don't think that disclosure – not just in the area of pensions, but in other aspects of investment selling – is as clear as it needs to be. We've recently announced that we're having another look at whether disclosure, as it is now, is really doing the job for investors."

• Heworth, the building company, has put its refractories business up for sale for more than £50m. The refractories division makes heat-resistant bricks for the steel industry. Professor Roland Smith, chairman of Heworth, has instructed merchant bankers Schroders to prepare a memorandum of sale. In the latest trading year the division made profits of £7.0m on sales of £162.9m.

• Poor customer service is costing British business £21bn a year, even though more than two-thirds of companies believe that how they serve customers is more important to their success than technical skills, according to a report published today. Reed Personnel Services, the recruitment consultancy, claims to be the first to quantify the cash cost of orders lost by poor service. It finds that recent "delaying" of middle management has placed increased stress on the roles of front-line staff. Never before has the front-line office worker carried as much responsibility for the commercial success of their company, says the report, based on an investigation of 301 businesses. Reed says that last year contracts worth an estimated £21bn, equivalent to nearly £1,000 per employee, were transferred to alternative supplies because of bad service, including poor telephone manner.

• Managers throughout the world are suffocating from information overload, according to a leading information provider, Reuters, one of the biggest providers of international and financial news in the world, called on businesses to develop better strategies for dealing with the information burden. The company said it believed information overload was a significant contributor to executive stress. Middle managers are most likely to suffer "very frequent" bouts of stress, with sales and marketing and public relations departments most under pressure.

STOCK MARKETS						
FTSE 100			INTEREST RATES			
UK interest rates				US interest rates		
11/10/96				11/10/96		
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1 Month	3 Month	1 Year
FTSE 100	4029.10	+3.3	+0.1	4035.60	3632.30	3.88
FTSE 250	4443.80	+5.9	+0.1	4588.60	4015.30	3.44
FTSE 350	2004.00	+1.9	+0.1	2006.10	1816.60	3.79
FT Small Cap	2178.76	-0.2	-0.1	2244.36	1954.00	3.12
FT All Share	1976.98	+1.7	+0.1	1978.92	1791.95	3.74
New York *	5999.38	-23.5	-0.4	5998.86	5	



GAVYN DAVIES

If the spending targets are hit, the electorate will be aggressively unhappy about its health and education provision in five years' time. The only alternatives would be to increase spending much more than planned, or move away from the principle of universal free provision at an adequate level.

Internet users are familiar with the FAQs – frequently asked questions – attached to cyberspace discussion groups. I am not aware that a discussion group exists on British fiscal policy, 1996-2000, but if it did, the following would be the FAQ section.

Is the public sector borrowing requirement still overshooting its targets for this year?

Yes, but the situation now seems to have stopped getting worse. In the 1995 Budget, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, set a target of £2.4bn for the PSBR this year. By the Summer Economic Forecast in July, he had increased this to £2.7bn, with much of the excess due to a shortfall in VAT and other taxes. Recent monthly figures for the PSBR have been very volatile, but the recent rise in consumer spending should fill the Treasury coffers from now on. The Green Budget published last week by Goldman Sachs and the Institute for Fiscal Studies reckons the eventual out-turn for the PSBR this year will be about £2.6bn.

What about next year?

Once again, the Chancellor will miss the PSBR targets he set in the November 1995 Budget by a wide margin. At that time, he announced plans intended to reduce the PSBR to £1.5bn in 1997/98. But disappointing growth in the economy seems to have scuppered this, and the likely out-turn on unchanged policy now seems to be around £2.1bn. Thus, if the Chancellor were really wedded to his previous PSBR objectives, he would raise taxes (or cut spending) by £2.5bn this year.

Not even Mr Clarke would do that; would he?

Of course not. He is not crazy. Instead, he will simply increase the target for the PSBR next year, and hope that no one notices. After all, this is exactly what he did last year, and no one really complained then. He can pull the same trick again this year.

Does that mean that the PSBR will fail to reach the acceptable level of 1 per cent of GDP when the economy is next on trend?

That indeed is the crucial question. Obviously, the greater the degree of spare capacity in the economy today, and the tighter

this year will be 3.5 per cent of GDP which is admitted far too high to maintain on a permanent basis. According to the Golden Rule of public finance, espoused by both Mr Clarke and Gordon Brown, the government should borrow no more than it invests over the long term. This suggests that the PSBR should average around 1 per cent of GDP which also happens to be the target set in the Stability Pact being prepared for future members of EMU. Even if we choose to stay out of the single currency, the market lets will require that we follow the same principles of sound finance that apply within EMU.

This means that the markets will be scrutinising the Budget to see whether it is likely to reduce the PSBR to around 1 per cent of GDP on a trend basis, even though this target will not be achieved by 1997/98. This year's Budget Red Book will indeed show plans which accomplish this by the end of the decade.

Why should the markets believe this pie in the sky when the PSBR overshoots targets all the time?

There will indeed be a great deal of justified scepticism about this. But there are two points on the Treasury's side. First, the economy is probably still working some 1-3 per cent of GDP below its normal capacity, since the spare capacity created in the recession of the early 1990s has not yet been eradicated. As output returns to its normal trend, there should be an automatic increase in tax receipts which will reduce the PSBR.

Second, the Government is intending to severely restrict the growth of public spending over the medium term, with the control total rising in real terms by only 0.5 per cent per annum. The share of spending in GDP will decline if these plans are hit, bringing the PSBR down over time.

Does that mean that the PSBR will fail to reach the acceptable level of 1 per cent of GDP when the economy is next on trend?

That indeed is the crucial question. Obviously, the greater the degree of spare capacity in the economy today, and the tighter



the real control total rising by an average of only 1 per cent per annum since 1992/93. But this period of tight spending control came after the bulge of 1992/93, when real spending surged by 6 per cent in a single year.

Experience over longer periods suggests that spending on health and education must rise at least in line with real GDP. Indeed, since people want relatively more of these services as their incomes rise, the demand for them will inexorably rise more rapidly than real GDP. And the scope for cuts in other areas of spending – mainly defence and capital investment – has been largely exhausted already. This means that if the spending targets are hit, the electorate is likely to be aggressively unhappy about its health and education provision in five years' time.

The only alternatives would seem to be to increase spending much more than planned, or move away from the principle of universal free provision at an adequate level for these services. After all, that is what the Tories

did to pensions in the 1980s. The real issue for the public finances in the next Parliament will be whether to bite this bullet. If it is not bitten, then spending will inexorably exceed targets, and tax cuts will not be possible. Indeed, tax increases would be quite likely.

How much of this will become apparent in the Budget?

Absolutely none at all. Mr Clarke will probably cut income tax by £3-4 bn, and justify this by claiming that he is cutting a similar amount off public spending in 1997/98. This will in effect repeat last year's Budget package, and will enable the Chancellor both to reduce the basic rate of income tax by 1p and to widen the 20p band by up to £1,000. It would not necessarily be a wise budget, since a large chunk of the spending cuts required to finance the tax giveaway would either be temporary, or come in the area of capital spending. But the resulting problems would be a headache for the next Chancellor, not the present one.

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science

Save the Earth – eat a turtle

Edward O Wilson is not your usual scientist. On the question of biodiversity, he's more pragmatist than preacher. Hugh Aldersley-Williams explains

There might be many reasons to save the Amazon river turtle. But the one Professor Edward O Wilson gives is unexpected: it tastes delicious.

Through his 1993 book *The Diversity of Life*, Wilson has probably done more to state the importance of biological diversity than any other scientist. Biodiversity, he has written, "is the key to the maintenance of the world as we know it".

Tonight at the Natural History Museum, Wilson will describe how that biodiversity has been tipped into sharp decline by the ignorance and foolishness of just one very familiar species. However, he is not one of those conservationists who wishes to fence nature off from human contact. Biodiversity should be cherished for our sake, not its own.

Which is where the turtle comes in. If farmed in the flood plains where it occurs naturally, it would yield 400 times the amount of meat produced by cattle raised in the same area of cleared forest. Wilson sees Earth's biodiversity as a vast potential resource – for food, medicines, education, entertainment, even mental health.

More than 40 years of field work has taken Wilson every-

where from Cuba to Fiji. His pioneering work on the biogeography of islands showed how diversity is related to the area of an ecosystem. Today this knowledge tells us what we can expect when habitats are eroded. It is not good.

The picture is made bleaker by recent reassessments of data on endangered species populations. A fortnight ago the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published new "red lists" that count 25 per cent of all mammals as "vulnerable" or "endangered" – up from 18 per cent two years ago. The US Nature Conservancy has raised the number of species at risk in the dozen groups that it follows up (including mammals, birds, flowering plants and butterflies) from 33 to 44 per cent. In the past 100 years, 1.5 per cent have become extinct.

Yet life on Earth is more diverse than at any time in its 600-million-year history. Naturalists have identified only a fraction of all species. Estimates of the number once ranged from 5 to 100 million, but are gradually converging to a figure of about 10 million species. Estimates of rates of extinction vary too. Methods based on island biogeography produce high figures. Recent analysis of the drift of species across IUCN categories, from "vulnerable" to "endangered" to "critically endangered" is more optimistic.

Biodiversity is under attack even where species should be safest. Wilson cites a recent study by William Newman of the Utah University of Natural History of the situation in American and Canadian national parks. "You can witness the decline of mammal species in these parks. They are disappearing exactly as predicted, namely the smaller the park the faster they are disappearing. No park is big enough."

Global extinction rates are perhaps thousands of times higher than before the coming of man. But we have been here before – or rather, our planet has. There have been five waves of extinction, each of which wiped out between 10 and 40 per cent of animal and plant families. "Our" extinction, the



Professor Wilson at the Natural History Museum, London: What difference does it make if some species are extinguished?

Nik Stangelove

sixth, is projected to eliminate up to 20 per cent of species. But then, most species that have ever lived are now extinct. And aren't we a species too? Anything we do is still done within our ecosystem.

"Why should we care?" Wilson asks. "What difference does it make if some species are extinguished, if even half of all the species on Earth disappear?" There are three main arguments. First and most venal, there is the potential benefit to humanity from chemical and genetic "prospecting" of little-

known species which might yield new crops or medicines. "I live in the real world. I have discovered, talking to national leaders from Newt Gingrich to business groups across the country, that you have to start there. People do not immediately understand the other arguments. I think the utilitarian argument is valid; in fact, it's exciting. There are so many beneficial effects that are possible."

Wilson describes a collaboration between the pharmaceuticals company Merck and Costa Rica's National Institute

of Biodiversity to collect and assay samples of flora and fauna. A share of royalties from the sales of any commercial products derived from these organisms goes back to fund local conservation programmes. Others are following. Brazil is currently drafting legislation which would regulate land use along these lines. "It's a movement that's beginning to spread around the world, but not fast enough to suit me."

Second is the aesthetic argument – that biodiversity should be preserved for our pleasure.

If we grow to love our ecosystems, that very familiarity will help to save them. Some say ecotourism merely brings pollution and disruption, but Wilson disagrees. "This is a startling misconception. The way I see it, it's vastly better to have some trails and a couple of camps in a rainforest than ad camp in a rainforest. That's what it comes down to in a lot of cases."

Third, Wilson believes there is a deeper reason for preserving biodiversity and for guaranteeing human access to it. "This is part of my conception

of 'biophilia', admittedly a subject not yet studied in any depth by psychologists. But there's some evidence that humanity responds in a positive way, and in fact enjoys better mental health, with access to natural environments. Our spirit needs the feeling that there are untamed regions."

The Diversity of Life lecture is a 7.30pm tonight at the Natural History Museum, London. For tickets contact Amanda de la Rosa at the museum's Development Trust on 0171 938 8973.

Doctor, my whole family has this giddy feeling...

Why do groups of people suddenly suffer vertigo? The answer may lie in a virus, says Bernard Dixon

One of the most puzzling conditions reported from time to time in the medical journals is epidemic vertigo. For no apparent reason, people in a particular place develop giddiness – a feeling that either they or their surroundings are spinning out of control – which lasts for a few days and then goes away. Some outbreaks of this sort have been put down to hysteria or imagination. The much more plausible cause is an infectious microbe, affecting the organs in the inner ear that control our sense of balance. Yet good evidence to support this idea has never been forthcoming.

A study of a vertigo outbreak in Wyoming, described in this month's *Epidemiology and Infection*, now strongly indicates that a virus is indeed to blame. The investigators, from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, have recommended practical measures to be adopted to any future incidents to make the conclusion watertight.

The Wyoming epidemic came to light when a local hospital in Hot Springs County began to receive patients suffering from acute vertigo. Over a period of several months, about 1 per cent of the popu-

lation of 5,000 people went to their family practitioner with the same complaint, some being sufficiently ill to require hospital treatment.

As the dizziness seemed

more of a curiosity than a condition causing serious medical concern, it did not attract the attention of the CDC in time for an immediate on-the-spot investigation. The investigators worked retrospectively, interviewing people who had suffered from vertigo to determine whether there were any other significant ways in which they

helped to account for the vertigo. Had they, for example, suffered from an acute illness during the previous month, or had any chronic health problems during the past 10 years? Had they been mountaineering, or bathed in hot springs? Participants also provided blood samples, which were tested for antibodies against several different viruses.

All the vertigo victims had experienced both a spinning sensation and problems with balance, accompanied in three-quarters of cases by nausea. Most also described symptoms such as buzzing in the ear or a temporary loss of hearing.

Some factors, such as mountaineering, were soon eliminated from the CDC analysis, and two different types of evidence clearly pointed towards a microbe as the cause. First, the victims were significantly more likely to have shown symptoms of a recent acute virus infection: these included fever, sore throat, diarrhoea, lethargy, fatigue and a general feeling of "getting the flu".

Second, the blood tests revealed a striking difference between the victims and the controls in their evidence of recent infection with an enterovirus. Three-quarters of the for-

mer had enterovirus antibodies in their bloodstream, as compared with just over half of the controls. Enteroviruses are a group that includes the polio virus and others which cause relatively mild infections, rashes and respiratory symptoms. The test used in the Wyoming investigation did not allow the particular member of the enterovirus group to be identified.

Each of these findings contributes to the conclusion that an enterovirus was the cause of the epidemic vertigo. The much higher frequency of enterovirus antibodies, together with actual symptoms of virus infection, in the vertigo victims strongly suggests that the virus was responsible for the condition. This is supported by the results of another, smaller-scale investigation of a vertigo outbreak in Atlanta in 1994 which revealed that these victims too had had an enterovirus infection.

One of the CDC researchers' motives in publishing their findings is to alert doctors and scientists elsewhere to the need to confirm their observations by speedy investigation of any future outbreaks. Their own work has shown the general identity of a virus that is the cause – or a crucial contributory cause – of this bizarre condition

of epidemic vertigo. Knowing that investigators should be able to identify the precise enterovirus through tests of throat and stool samples taken from victims while they are still infected.

Unfortunately enteroviruses, like most other viruses, are not susceptible to drugs in the way

that bacteria are to antibiotics. Nevertheless, identifying the cause of epidemic vertigo will bring several benefits. They include the likelihood of determining why certain people are especially vulnerable to this particular virus, and of developing a vaccine that could protect high-risk individuals.



Don't look down: 'epidemic' vertigo has puzzled scientists

Microbe of the Month

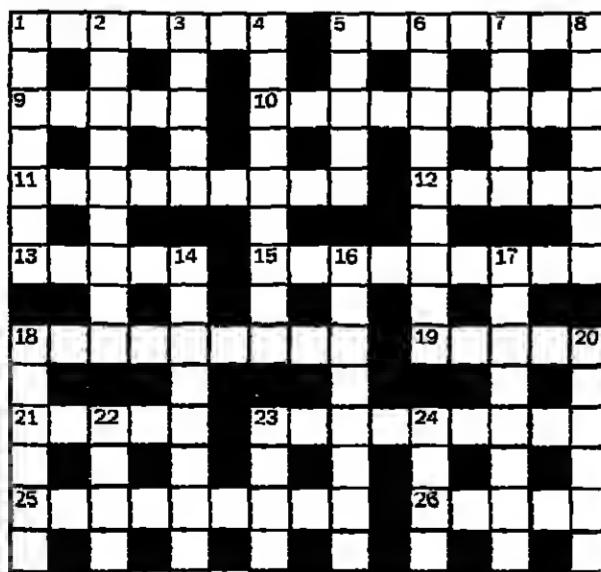
differed from those who had not been affected.

First, they eliminated any individuals whose vertigo could have been attributable to a well-known cause such as high blood pressure. The investigators asked them and a control group that matched the patients in age and sex – a wide range of questions about activities and experiences that could have

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No 3117, Monday 14 October

By Portia



ACROSS

- Potential undertaking (7)
- Manage to follow on (7)
- Work on a great many square stones (5)
- Roughly handle and scratch a barrel inside (4,5)
- Popular belief about a saint giving up (9)
- Fellow's awful year with heavenly female (5)
- Supply European with crack (5)

DOWN

- Biographical sketch put together for column (7)
- Covering report to be paid for later (2,7)
- Children's edition (5)
- It's French, by the way (2,7)
- Substantial part of aerosol I discovered (5)
- Refuse in order to get at flyer (9)
- Call up girl who's keeping well (3)
- Take from critic having no alternative (7)
- Obtaining block lined with aluminium (9)
- They play number in a shorter arrangement (9)
- Anger surrounds shake out of company (9)
- Can't recall having this condition (7)
- Most wanted soldiers to move quickly (7)
- Famous siege of a US city ended by doctor (5)
- Support Irish dramatist, by the sound of it (5)
- Mark left a band in reduced circumstances (5)

